

Androscoggin River Watershed

Requesting: \$15,000



September 18, 2023

Oxford County Commissioners
Oxford County Budget Committee
P. O. Box 179
26 Western Ave.
South Paris, ME 04281

Dear Commissioners and Budget Committee Members,

I am writing today requesting \$15,000 be included in the Oxford County 2024 Budget in support of the Androscoggin River Watershed Council (ARWC). This funding will support our traditional work and continue to enhance several programs.

Oxford County's generous contribution for 2023 helped the Council undertake numerous projects benefitting Oxford County communities, the Androscoggin River and many tributaries and water bodies within Oxford County.

Our work on the Androscoggin River Trail, the Maine West Calm Waters (map and guide to lake access sites in the Little Androscoggin watershed), and brook trout habitat restoration provides many returns to the economy and health of communities throughout Oxford County.

River and lake access for recreation and fishing provides both tourism amenities and outdoor recreation opportunities for Oxford County residents. Our maps and guides to public access sites enhances the enjoyment of the water resources. Brook trout habitat work helps to ensure that the trout will continue to thrive in one of the last bastions for this iconic species. Western Maine is known for quality trout fishing; anglers from near and far are attracted to the Androscoggin and its tributaries seeking the adventure of catching a beautiful brook trout.

Notable projects over the past year have been:

- continued water quality and temperature testing on the Androscoggin River,
- invertebrate sampling in conjunction with Maine DEP and Maine Audubon on the Ellis River in Andover, and Mill Brook in Bethel (previously Wild and Sunday Rivers),
- outreach to the public and stakeholders in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act including a presentation at a special ceremony in Rumford, and celebrations at the Paris River Park and in Canton,

The Androscoggin River Trail



- minor updates to the Androscoggin River Trail interactive map and guide,
- projects to control erosion/phosphorus on Lake Anasagunstickook
- work with the Hartford Road Commissioner to evaluate roadside erosion and undersized culverts, and provide guidance to the town on a DEP and FEMA grants to replace undersized and deteriorating culverts,
- technical assistance to the Town of Norway on comprehensive planning and shoreland zoning along the Crooked River, which has been identified as major Landlocked Salmon breeding and rearing habitat.

Highlights of these and other projects Oxford County supported are included at the end of this letter as are the ARWC budget projections for our next fiscal year (2023-2024).

This \$15,000 request is a 20% increase over the amount you approved in the past year in order to not only support projects that are on-going, but to continue our project to identify fish passage issues in the Ellis River watershed (Andover and Rumford) and potentially expand the project to other tributaries. The Oxford County area of the Androscoggin watershed holds considerable promise for brook trout habitat in its tributaries that are becoming increasingly important as cold water refuge. Past work in the Sunday River, Bear River, and Nezinscot River watersheds has opened 17 miles of brook trout habitat.

In addition to the fish passage inventory of tributaries to the Androscoggin, Oxford County's contribution for 2024 will be used to maintain our on-going projects and develop additional projects in direct response to the needs of municipalities in the Oxford County. We will also seek federal, state and philanthropic grants to further assist the County and municipalities address habitat and environmentally related infrastructure problems.

Current programs include

- Trout Habitat Restoration, including maintaining up-to-date knowledge of fishery issues,
- Lake Protection work,
- Water Quality and Temperature Testing with data delivered to state agencies (DEP and IFW),
- Androscoggin River Trail improvement and annual coordination of special paddles on the Androscoggin River.
- Stewardship projects to maintain river access sites in Oxford County, and enhance the Maine West Calm Waters interactive map and guide.
- Assistance to municipalities with habitat and water quality issues including applying for and administering grants.
- Coordination with State agencies on access, habitat and water quality programs and issues.

ARWC applies for grants for specific major projects. However, grant funding does not cover all staff time or materials for our on-going projects that are important to keeping the river user-friendly and the watershed healthy. A number of grants require considerable up-front work that

**Androscoggin
River Trail**

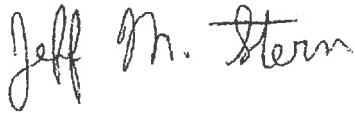


The Androscoggin River Trail

is not covered by grants. Grants also usually require matching funds for which we depend on support from generous donors.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have or supply additional information about any projects and look forward to discussing this request with you in person. I hope we can count on your support for our work in 2024. Please see attached list of projects you have supported in 2023 and a projected budget for ARWC FY 2023-24.

Sincerely yours,



Jeff Stern
ARWC Environmental Director
207-595-0317 Cell; sternjm@hotmail.com

The Androscoggin River Trail



Projects Oxford County supported in 2023

- Completed the Erosion and Phosphorus Control Project for Canton Lake (Lake Anasagunticook) involving both Canton and Hartford.
- Continued assistance to the Town of Hartford for a stream crossing on Pratt Hill Rd. and evaluation of other erosion and fish passage problems.
- Trained volunteers and coordinated volunteer Water Quality Monitoring on four Androscoggin River sites in Bethel, West Bethel, Rumford and Hanover, two sites on the Ellis River and a site in Paris on the Little Androscoggin River. All testing was done in conjunction with the DEP Volunteer River Monitoring Program with the results published on the DEP website.
- Maintained the Androscoggin River Trail Map and Guide and the Maine West Calm Waters map and guide that highlights lake access sites on lakes in the Little Androscoggin River watershed.
- Continued stewardship of access sites on the Androscoggin River.
- Website and social media outreach.
- Coordinated and promoted activities for the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act including
 - worked with the Canton Historical Society to hold a paddle on Lake Anasagunticook,
 - worked with the Town of Paris and the Western Foothills Land Trust to hold an event at the relatively new Paris River Park, and
 - coordinated with the Town of Rumford to kick off the summer with a public event recognizing the work of Senator Edmund Muskie with a presentation by Senator Collins at the Rumford Falls Park
- Presentations on our important work on fish habitat and recreation in Oxford County at ARWC board meetings and the ARWC annual conference,
- Participated in the Maine West collaborative to improve recreational trails and ensure water recreation and fish habitat are considered in the collaborative's health, recreation and conservation work. (Information exchange and support for outdoor recreation will continue.)

Additional Projects for Oxford County for 2024

- Continue fish barrier and connectivity assessment in the Ellis River Watershed and expand to other area tributaries as finances allow.
- Enhance the Androscoggin River Trail and Maine West Calm Waters interactive maps and guides (arwc.maps.arcgis.com). (Change the font In this bullet to match everything else in the letter!)

Thank you for helping to make these projects possible!

**Androscoggin
River Trail**

The Androscoggin River Trail

FY 2024 Budget (ARWC Oct 1 to Sep 30)	
Revenues	
Unrestricted Carryover	\$2,000.00
Philanthropic donations	\$12,000.00
Oxford County	\$15,000.00
Membership	\$1,000.00
Conference income	\$2,500.00
Fish Passage Improvements (pass through)	\$30,000
Anticipated Grants/Contracts	\$20,000.00
Lake Protection Grant	\$6,000
Total Revenues	\$88,500.00
Expenditures	
Staff*	\$45,000
Phone, Insurance, Web site, misc. overhead	\$4,000.00
Lake Protection	\$4,000
Fish passage/design and construction (pass through)	\$30,000.00
Conference Expenses	\$2,000.00
Misc Program Expenses	\$3,500.00
Total Expenditures	\$88,500.00



Bethel Area District Exchange & Food Pantry

Requesting: \$6,400

Abby Shanor

From: Dave Bean <executivedirector@bethelareafoodpantry.org>
Sent: Tuesday, September 26, 2023 12:57 PM
To: Abby Shanor
Subject: Request of Financial Support through the Fiscal Budget

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

The Bethel Area District Exchange and Food Pantry requests \$6,400.00 in the 2024 Oxford County budget.

1. We serve 64/698 client/neighbors in Albany.
2. We serve 2/698 client/neighbors in Milton.
3. We serve 46/698 client/neighbors in Unorganized Territory.

Also, we work in collaboration with Good Shepherd Food Bank to Oxford County produce and fruit to food pantries in Oxford, at Stephens Memorial Hospital, in Peru, Rumford, and Andover among others.

We spend \$40,000.00 per year solely on food.

We served client/neighbors in Albany, Andover, Bethel, Bryant Pond, Buckfield, Dixfield, East Andover, Gilead, Greenwood, Hanover, Mexico, Newry, Norway, Oxford Raymond, Rumford, South Paris, Milton, Unorganized Territories, Upton, West Bethel, West Paris, and Woodstock.

We came up with our budget request by figuring the percentage that Albany, Milton, and the Unorganized Territories comprise, 16% of our total food budget, \$40,000.00.

Thank you so much for helping us support Western Maine,

DB

Dave Bean, he, him, his
Executive Director
Bethel Area District Exchange and Food Pantry
207-890-4022

Bethel Regional Airport

Requesting: \$7,000

TOWN OF BETHEL

19 Main Street
PO Box 1660
Bethel, ME 04217



Phone: 207-824-2669
Fax: 207-824-3355
www.bethelmaine.org

September 8, 2023

Natalie Andrews
Bethel Town Manager
19 Main St. Bethel, ME 04217

Oxford County Commissioners
Oxford County Budget Committee
P.O. Box 179 South Paris, ME 04281

RECEIVED

SEP 19 2023

OXFORD COUNTY
TREASURER'S OFFICE

Subject: Budget Request for the Town of Bethel-Airport

Dear Oxford County Commissioners and Oxford County Budget Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Town of Bethel to request financial consideration from the Oxford County Commissioners and the Oxford County Budget Committee as you begin your budget process.

The primary focus of our budget request pertains to the Bethel Regional Airport, which plays a critical role in our community and serves as a vital transportation hub for our region. The Town of Bethel has witnessed a significant increase in expenses related to the airport, with a notable 17.06% rise. These escalating costs are primarily attributed to maintaining and improving the airport's infrastructure, enhancing safety measures, and complying with the necessary regulations. The budget expenses for FY24 totaled \$243,220., with a revenue offset of \$177,988. I am not sending out requests to other towns, as they already contribute to the County, and to request monies from the towns and the county would be requesting from the towns twice.

As we continue to manage these rising expenses, we acknowledge the importance of being competitive, particularly in the context of our neighboring county airport. To address this, we have taken a proactive stance to offer gas pricing at the Bethel Regional Airport that is more aligned with the pricing at the Oxford County Airport. We believe that this approach will not only attract more local traffic but also encourage travelers from the county and beyond to utilize our facilities, ultimately benefiting the broader community.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that Bethel Regional Airport plays a significant role in supporting critical emergency services. Life Flight and Angel Flight and PALS (Patient Air Lift Services), essential medical air transport services, rely on our airport to provide swift and efficient aid to the unorganized territories within Oxford County. This collaborative effort ensures that individuals in these remote areas have access to timely medical care and lifesaving interventions when needed most.

In light of these factors, we kindly request financial support from the Oxford County Commissioners and the Oxford County Budget Committee to help offset the increased operational expenses of the Bethel Regional Airport for FY 24 in the amount of \$7,000. The funds requested will be allocated towards infrastructure improvements, safety enhancements, and ongoing operational costs, allowing us to maintain and enhance the quality of services we provide to our community and the county as a whole.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of our budget request and your continued support in fostering a safe and efficient transportation network within Oxford County. We believe that by working together, we can ensure the sustained success of Bethel Regional Airport and the essential services it facilitates.

If you require any additional information or have any questions regarding our budget request, please do not hesitate to contact Amy Hanscom, Finance Director at 207-824-2669. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss our proposal in further detail.

Thank you for your time and commitment to the well-being of our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Natalie Andrews". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name.

Natalie Andrews
Town Manager
Town of Bethel

Children's Advocacy Center

Requesting: \$15,000



Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services

Serving Oxford, Franklin and Androscoggin Counties

www.sapars.org

September 27, 2023

Oxford County Commissioners Office
Attention: Abby Shanor
26 Western Avenue, #2
Paris, Maine 04281

Dear Oxford County Commissioners & Community Members:

On behalf of our program; those we have served, do serve and will serve in the future; and our multidisciplinary partners who provide joint investigations and support services to children and families impacted by child abuse in Oxford County, we are writing to ask for you to consider providing funding for partial staffing costs that we continue to struggle to cover post COVID pandemic. You will see the letters of support from those very multidisciplinary partners who, alongside us, plea for your support.

The Children's Advocacy Center of Androscoggin, Franklin & Oxford Counties (CAC AFO), which is a program of the Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Services, provides a child friendly, trauma informed and forensically sound space for children and their supportive care providers to come to after there has been an allegation of child abuse. Our program is a multidisciplinary team initiative that includes partners from law enforcement; prosecution; child protective services; medical; mental health; and advocacy providers. Our CAC is also proud to be a Nationally Accredited Center, for over 15 years, that prides itself on striving for excellence and best practices in responding to cases of child abuse.

The programs mission is to promote the healing of victims of child sexual abuse by providing a strong community response to the investigation, treatment, and prevention of abuse.

Many children wait to report or never report child sexual abuse. Therefore, the numbers below likely underestimate the true impact of the problem. Although estimates vary across studies, the research shows:

- About **1 in 4 girls** and **1 in 13 boys** in the United States **experience child sexual abuse.**
(Center for Disease, Control & Prevention)
- In Maine, **1 in 4 girls** and **1 in 6 boys** **report being sexually assaulted before the age of 18.**
- **Someone known and trusted by the child or child's family members, perpetrates 91% of child sexual abuse.** *(Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault)*

ANDROSCOGGIN COUNTY
182 Webster St. | Lewiston, ME 04240
207-784-5272

FRANKLIN COUNTY
144 High St. | Farmington, ME 04938
207-778-9522

OXFORD COUNTY
66 Paris St. | Norway, ME 04268
207-743-9777

24 HOUR RESPONSE SERVICES
1-800-871-7741
1-888-458-5599 (TTY)

This work is supported by funding from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services; the United Way of Oxford, Franklin and Androscoggin Counties; Franklin County Commissioners; the cities and towns of Oxford and Androscoggin Counties; and donations by generous businesses, organizations and individuals.



Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services

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This year we have seen a **significant increase** in the number of cases in Oxford County. Since January, we have served **87 children/youth (which is more than twice the number served at this time last year)** and **41 non offending care providers**, alongside our partners, in Oxford County. Of those served we were able to facilitate and ensure the following short term and long term needs were met:

- 100% of the families experienced a timely, joint & collaborative response to the outcry of abuse in their family.
- 100% of the families received assessments of their overall needs for safety & wellness.
- 100% of the families received follow up calls to ensure their needs were being met.
- 100% of the cases that came to the CAC cases were reviewed by the multidisciplinary team within 30 days to ensure all partner agencies were collaborating and gathering forensic evidence to strengthen the accountability to the perpetrators of these crimes.

***In addition to the immediate needs of the clients we served we were able to, at the request of the families, refer and ensure the additional support was met:*

- 23 families received short term & long term victim advocacy
- 16 adults & 37 children received immediate mental health intervention and services
- 9 children received immediate medical services
- 8 families received legal expertise/support from Pine Tree Legal Services

Of the cases that came to the CAC in Oxford, specifically, **88% of victims knew their perpetrator. 32% of the children/youth victims served were male—which has increased by 50% from the previous year.**

Our request would partially cover the cost of our nationally certified child forensic interviewer who specializes in trauma informed; forensically sound; child lead interviews in the aftermath of an outcry of child abuse. The CAC Forensic Interviewer is trained in the best evidence based, technically sound and non-duplicative manner to minimize the potential trauma to the child when disclosing their truth and sharing the very pertinent details of a crime committed against them. These recorded interviews are observed only by the child protective and criminal investigators assigned to the case to ensure all aspects of safety and legal aspects of the crime are being investigated at that one forensic interview vs what had been happening prior to the CAC model

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coming to our state. These interviews are recorded, with the supportive care provider's consent, and used evidence for criminal and safety investigations.

Our request would partially cover the cost of the full time family advocate. The family advocate provides critical services including: being the first person to connect with the supportive caregiver where they are able to provide support, answer questions, and provide reassurance about the CAC process; collaborating with law enforcement, the DA's office, and child protective services to schedule interviews and ensure that all partners have the information that they need at the beginning of the investigation; creating a supportive and non-judgemental space for the child and their supportive caregiver at the CAC on the day of the interview; ensuring that referrals to medical, mental health, legal, and advocacy services are available to children and their supportive caregivers; and providing follow up support after the CAC visit. The family advocate makes sure the children and families are supported throughout the process and connected to follow up services which is crucial for healing and thriving.

We are requesting \$15,000 to go towards the cost of our full time Family Advocate's salary. This translates into 33% of their annual salary & fringe. See below the breakdown of the annual cost for this position to our agency:

Hourly rate	\$ 19
Annual salary	\$39,520
SUTA	\$ 456
FICA	\$ 3,023
Health insurance	\$ 4,617
Workers' comp	\$ 187
Total salary & fringe	\$47,803

In addition to this funding ask we have the following fundraising efforts on target for the rest of 2023/beginning of 2024:

- No Shave November—partner agencies do not shave for the month of November and proceeds go towards our program's needs.
- Tackle Child Abuse—this is a themed Super Bowl event where we have local community partners and members raise funds to end child abuse.
- Cornhole for a Cause Tournament on Nov 11, 2023
- Softball Tournament—we have a friendly competition softball tournament between our multidisciplinary agencies.

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- Giving Tuesday—this is an online fundraiser that happens every November.

We appreciate all consideration and support you can provide us for our overall efforts on behalf of the youngest victims of violence in your communities and their non-offending care providers. Please advise what we need to do next in order to be approved for this greatly needed support.

With warmest regards,

Meg Hatch, SAPARS Executive Director

Email: meg.hatch@sapars.org

Phone: (personal) 207-692-3072

(office) 207-784-5272

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Community Concepts Finance Corporation

Requesting: \$112,000

2024 Funding Request to the Oxford County Commissioners & Budget Committee

Community Concepts Finance Corporation (CCFC) provides business and economic development services to Oxford County, and, for the coming fiscal year, CCFC is requesting \$112,000 from the Oxford County government to cover salaries, administrative overhead, and program operation costs. CCFC works to address the economic needs of Oxford County holistically, in the following ways:

- CCFC facilitates economic development by collaborating with a variety of public, nonprofit, and private partners to serve as a catalyst for growth. The organization focuses on business growth, job creation and retention, workforce development, transportation and telecommunication infrastructure, and the marketing of Oxford County as a business and recreational destination.
- As a lender for start-ups, riskier ventures, and well-established companies, CCFC serves the whole State of Maine, but focuses outreach and investment into communities in Oxford, Androscoggin, Franklin, and Cumberland Counties. As a mission-based lender, CCFC provides capital and technical assistance to business start-ups, existing businesses looking to grow, and partners with other financial institutions to fund larger development projects in our service area.
- CCFC also serves the communities of Oxford County as a residential lender for first-time homebuyers and individuals and families who have difficulty accessing conventional financing. Critical to our borrower's success is the credit counseling, homebuyer education, and pre-purchase advising we provide to hundreds of clients each year by our HUD-certified counselors. These services advise new homebuyers of their options and help them find mortgage options that will economically empower them over time as homeowners, and not trap them under burdensome debt.

CCFC's Oxford County Activities for Fiscal Year 2023

As the pandemic period fades into memory, the Oxford County businesses CCFC staff have been working with are experiencing a variety of challenges. The shortage of workers combined with increased cost of goods, services, utilities, property, and financing has created pinch points for growth. CCFC has spent considerable time coaching business clients on ways to navigate these waters, ranging from investment in equipment and efficiency, reduction of energy

Business Assistance – Homeownership – Economic Development

consumption, expanding into new markets, downsizing office space and storefronts, renegotiating agreements with suppliers and lenders, state and federal government procurement, among other areas.

Since we pair lending with technical assistance for both residential and commercial customers (for example, homebuyer education and financial capability training; business technical assistance on topics ranging from HR, regulatory, QuickBooks, accounting, inventory management, marketing, etc.), we’ve seen increased demand for technical assistance services on the commercial side (i.e., facilitating applications to various federal assistance programs, etc.) while homebuyer education services have remained steady (roughly 1 out of every 3 graduates become a homeowner in 12 months, but that statistic lags and we expect changes due to the tight real estate market and increasing interest rates and home prices).

Business Investment — Central to CCFC’s mission is a dedication to the small business community, and the jobs and quality of life these businesses provide. As part of that mission the organization continues to fund projects across Oxford County. As of our most recent quarter end, June 30th, 2023, CCFC had active investments in 29 Oxford County businesses, representing an original investment of \$4,1249,304.

Residential Investment — As housing inventory in Oxford County remains very low, housing and development interest rates and costs have surged since early 2022. CCFC is focusing on growing the residential program to accommodate low to moderate income seniors and working families who are being priced out of this market by financing rehab of dilapidated properties and smaller, low-cost housing including mobile homes. CCFC assisted five Oxford County households in purchasing homes in the last year, representing an investment of \$475,300.

Even with these larger challenges, CCFC continues to service 28 residential loans in Oxford County representing an original investment of \$1,715,234.

Oxford County Lending Activity by Town — Listed below is each town in Oxford County, and how many loans, both residential and business, that are currently active as of June 30th, 2023. Towns that are not listed have no active investments from CCFC.

Bethel (5)	Brownfield (1)	Buckfield (6)	Canton (5)
Dixfield (7)	Fryeburg (1)	Greenwood (1)	Hebron (2)
Mexico (1)	Norway (11)	Otisfield (1)	Oxford (16)
Peru (1)	Rumford (3)	South Paris (8)	Stow (1)
Sumner (2)	Waterford (3)	West Paris (2)	
TOTAL (75)			

Business Assistance – Homeownership – Economic Development

Homeownership Center — CCFC offers many one-on-one and group counseling and education services through this business line, including homeownership classes (in-person and online) for first-time homeowners and veterans who want a refresher. We also offer pre-purchase counseling, budget counseling, financial coaching, counseling, and education, tax preparation assistance as well as foreclosure counseling. CCFC is on track to deliver Homebuyer Education to over 550 new and prospective homeowners in Oxford County, and coaching and assistance in applying for the Homeowners Assistance Fund to more than 450 existing Oxford County homeowners.

Marketing the advantages of doing business in Oxford County and available locations — CCFC maintains a list of available commercial land and buildings in Oxford County that are for sale and/or lease. CCFC assists property owners in identifying potential tenants as well as businesses and organizations that are looking for space to buy or lease.

Assisting Oxford County communities with Economic Development

- Broadband internet development — CCFC has continued its partnership with the Northern Forest Center and Maine West in implementing the plan that Axiom Technologies prepared for the Maine West region. Below are some of the initiatives and steps we are taking to improve and expand the availability of high-speed broadband:
 - Continue advocating with the Maine Connectivity Authority for expanded fiber internet service with FirstLight in the Mahoosuc/SAD44 area, facilitated negotiation with FirstLight on terms of service and residential and commercial pricing for fiber internet service in this area and other towns that FirstLight provides service to if it is awarded grant funds, advocated with Mahoosuc towns to designate their ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds for expanding high-speed internet service.
 - Continued supporting and working with Hartford, Hebron and Sumner to expand high-speed internet service. FirstLight fiber internet service is available to all residents and businesses in Sumner and Hebron and some residents in Hartford.
 - Installed a WiFi hotspot at Longley Square to provide free public access internet service in downtown Norway. Two hotspots are being installed at Mahoosuc Trust’s Valentine Farm in Bethel. Requests to install hotspots at Roberts Farm in Norway in the parking lot and at the Common area in Woodstock are under consideration. The cost of the hotspot equipment and installation is covered by a Northern Border Regional Commission grant that was awarded to CCFC. The Northern Forest Center is contributing the cost of maintenance and monitoring

Business Assistance - Homeownership - Economic Development

- for the hotspots for the first three years. Hotspots have been installed and are operational at the following locations:
- Bethel Public Library (1)
 - Gazebo on the Bethel Common (1)
 - Crystal Lake Park in Harrison (1)
 - Harrison town office parking lot (1)
 - Harrison Food Bank (1)
 - Longley Square in Norway (1)
- Continue supporting Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband which includes all of the Maine towns in MSAD72 – Denmark, Brownfield, Lovell, Stow, Sweden, Stoneham, Fryeburg – and their efforts to expand high-speed internet service. Awarded a \$250,000 grant by the Maine Connectivity Authority in collaboration with the Northern Forest Center and Community Concepts to develop a digital equity plan and the following digital inclusion services for Oxford County.
- Created and hired a full-time digital navigator position to provide free, one-on-one, in-person technical support and assistance to Oxford County residents in using a computing device and connecting them with other available resources.
 - Purchased 140 recycled laptops and tablets from SAD44 to be given to Oxford County residents who don't have a device and at no cost to recipients.
 - Purchasing 45 new laptops in partnership with the Northern Forest Center to replace old public access devices in Oxford County libraries and adult education programs.
 - Facilitated eight organizations in Oxford County becoming on-site partners for National Digital Equity Center (NDEC) interactive classes on a variety of digital topics that are free to Maine residents. On-site partners in Oxford County include:
 - Region 9 Adult Education
 - SAD44 Adult Education
 - Lake Region & Fryeburg Area Adult Education
 - UMA Rumford Center
 - HOPE Association
 - The Progress Center
 - Bethel Library
 - Fryeburg Library

Business Assistance - Homeownership - Economic Development

- Downtown development – CCFC staff serves on the Norway Downtown board of directors.
- Workforce development – CCFC collaborated with Rural Aspirations and the Northern Forest Center in applying for a \$1.5 million, three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to deliver extended learning opportunities in SAD44, SAD17, RSU10 and RSU56 that would connect high school students with career pathways in the communities where they live and go to school.
- Tourism planning and development — CCFC is a partner in the Bethel Community Destination Academy (CDA), a project developed in partnership with the Maine Office of Tourism and the Northern Forest Center to support destination development projects in high potential Rural Destination Areas. CCFC recruited a trainer to deliver a workshop for front-line staff on serving people who have a disability.
- Regional Collaboration – Participated on a committee representing Bethel, Greenwood and Woodstock that investigated how workforce/middle-income housing can be supported by assessing the towns' ordinances and codes and reviewing alternative approaches to and designs for residential development.

CCFC remains dedicated to building a stronger more diverse economic landscape in Oxford County and based on our current successes and our past track record we believe we have the team to do the job. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Nate Libby, President



Mia Purcell, Vice President of
Economic Development and Impact

Eastern Slopes Airport

Requesting: \$5,000



August 28, 2023

Donald Durrah, County Administrator
Oxford County, Maine
P.O. Box 179
South Paris, ME 04281

Dear Administrator Durrah:

On behalf of the Board of Directors for the Eastern Slope Airport Authority, I would like to thank you and the County Commissioners for your past support of the Eastern Slope Regional Airport in Fryeburg. It is job of the airport authority to operate, maintain and manage the Airport for the region it serves. The Airport creates jobs both directly and indirectly, is home to the Aviation Academy which encourages young people to pursue careers in aviation, hosts business users and private pilots, and is the direct reason for several people choosing Oxford County as their new home where they contribute to the tax base. The Airport is an economic engine in the County, providing vital air transportation in its many forms including military, volunteer medical flights through Angel Flight, and emergency medical flights and services. Costs have increased year over year and financial support for this asset is critical to our on-going efforts to maintain a safe and viable airport facility for all users.

Please consider this letter as a request of \$5,000 from the Oxford County budget for the upcoming fiscal year, 2024. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Allison Navia', is written over a horizontal line.

Allison Navia, Airport Manager
Eastern Slope Airport Authority, Town of Fryeburg, Oxford County, Maine

CC: Don Thibodeau, Chair Eastern Slope Airport Authority
Abby Shanor, Oxford County

Oxford County Extension

Requesting: \$111,750

Oxford County Extension Association

9 Olson Road, South Paris, ME 04281
207.743.6329 1.800.287.1482 (in Maine)

2024 BUDGET

Staff Salaries & Benefits.....	\$ 70,765
Administrative Specialist (F/T).....	\$43,650
4-H CEA (F/T).....	\$11,200
Hort CEA (P/T).....	\$15,600
4H Temp Support.....	\$315
 Program Support.....	 \$ 11,850
4-H.....	\$ 5,350
4-H/STEM.....	\$ 2,000
Agriculture/Home Hort.....	\$ 4,000
Homemakers.....	\$ 500
 Building Expenses.....	 \$ 17,400
Building Maintenance.....	\$ 9,500
Insurance.....	\$ 2,000
Fuel.....	\$ 3,500
Electricity.....	\$ 2,400
 Office Expenses.....	 \$ 11,735
Telephone.....	\$ 700
Office Supplies.....	\$ 6,000
Postage.....	\$ 700
Printing/Copier.....	\$ 4,300
Board Expense.....	\$ 35
 TOTAL.....	 \$111,750

OXFORD COUNTY EXTENSION ASSOCIATION

9 Olson Road, South Paris, ME 04281

207.743.6329 or 1.800.287.1482

Officers

August 2023

Carl Costanzi

President
Norway

Commissioner David Duguay

Commissioner Steven Merrill

Phoebe Call

Vice President
South Paris

Commissioner Timothy Turner

Members of the County Budget Committee

Tavia Melhus

Treasurer
West Paris

FY2024 Budget Request

TOTAL BUDGET REQUEST: We respectfully request \$111,750. This reflects an increase of \$11,650, due to inflation in costs of staffing, utilities and services.

Members

Theresa Kelly

Pownal

Chris Easton

Waterford

Deborah Richmond

Mason Twp.

Shelly Shibles

Waterford

The focus of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension – Oxford County’s work has developed in response to county need, identified by guidance from local clients and community leaders. Our educational efforts focus on the **Maine Food System** (commercial agriculture, home horticulture, food security and nutrition), **Positive Youth Development** (4-H youth leadership), and **Community and Economic Development** (business development and Extension Homemakers).

We are part of the nationwide Cooperative Extension System, which works through the land-grant universities in each U.S. state. Maine’s land-grant university is in Orono at the University of Maine. In addition to our state offices in Orono, we have a network of county-based offices staffed by experts who provide practical, locally based solutions for farmers, small business owners, youth, parents, seniors, consumers, and all community members. We receive federal support through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), state support through the University of Maine, and local support through Maine county governments.

Each year, Oxford County has generously provided the local University of Maine Cooperative Extension office in South Paris with funds to cover staff salaries, programming funds, building maintenance and utilities, equipment and office supplies. **Every dollar of county funding secures a \$7.68 match from the University of Maine**, thereby ensuring the continuation of the programs in our communities. We sincerely appreciate your strong financial commitment to this office’s work over the years – thank you!

We are committed to using the county’s financial support to fully leverage our impact to youth, seniors, and low-income individuals and families in Oxford County. Please refer to our ‘Annual Report 2022 - 2023’ for a comprehensive look at how our work impacts our county. We look forward to continuing to expand on this work in 2024!

Respectfully submitted,



Carl Costanzi

President

Oxford County Extension Association

Oxford County

→ BY THE NUMBERS

JULY 2022 - JULY 2023



4 Full-time staff



**59 4-H Leaders
and Volunteers**



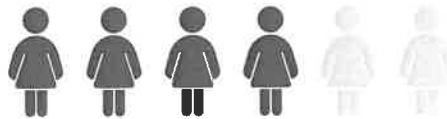
**16 Master
Gardener
Volunteers**



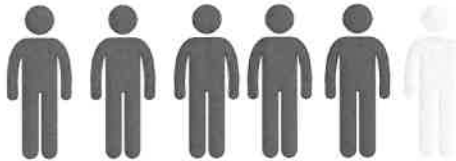
**20 Extension
Homemakers**

with the support of UMaine Cooperative Extension staff, programs and diagnostic labs statewide reached:

452 YOUTH



583 ADULTS



**Positive Youth
Development**



**Food Safety &
Nutrition**



**Sustainable
Farming**



S.T.E.A.M



**Ecological
Gardening**



Food Security

\$2,800

worth of equipment and resources

Lending Library: sampling and monitoring equipment (worth over \$1,500) was loaned to farmers and 15 educational resources (worth over \$1,300) have been loaned out to various community members, teachers and volunteers.

650

hours of community projects

Master Gardener Volunteers contributed over 650 hours on community projects, adding \$18,750 in value to our community.



Through the Harvest for Hunger program, **404** pounds of produce was recovered from farms for distribution through hunger relief organizations.

TESTIMONIALS



"Robin's presence at the Alan Day Community Garden has been invaluable. The enthusiasm that she brings to her demonstrations captivates the attention of any audience, and is sure to leave a lasting impression. We are lucky to have such a passionate and caring educator in our community who is able to provide students a window into the magic of compost and organic gardening." - **Alan Day Community Garden**



"The town of Waterford has been fortunate to be working with Master Gardener Volunteers on two of our local gardens – a pollinator/therapy garden at the Library and a Community Garden on the fairgrounds. Working with the Master Gardener Volunteers from the start has not only increased our own knowledge as they share theirs, but has truly enabled our gardens to flourish in more ways than we had imagined. Our gardens would not be what they are today without their support and we are deeply grateful." - **Doretta, Waterford Resident**



"You all are doing a FANTASTIC job with this course. I really appreciate the high-quality programming. It is clear what efforts you all put into planning and implementing incredible learning opportunities for our youth. You are very much appreciated!!" - **4-H Parent**

2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Oxford County

University of Maine Cooperative Extension



In complying with the letter and spirit of applicable laws and pursuing its own goals of diversity, the University of Maine System does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, transgender status, gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship status, familial status, ancestry, age, disability physical or mental, genetic information, or veterans or military status in employment, education, and all other programs and activities. The University provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies: Director of Equal Opportunity, 5713 Chadbourne Hall, Room 412, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469-5713, 207.581.1226, TTY 711 (Maine Relay System).

2022 Annual Report

Office of the Dean

Welcome to the University of Maine Cooperative Extension! We are located in every corner of the state in 16 county offices, research farms, 4-H camps and learning centers, and online. We are the largest outreach component of the University of Maine and reach more Maine people than any other entity within the seven campus University of Maine System. Our work is focused on helping Maine communities thrive and we do so by connecting people to research-based information, education and services. UMaine Cooperative Extension conducts the state's most successful out-of-school youth education program through 4-H, empowering young people to reach their full potential. Our youth programming also includes our 4-H camps and learning centers which provide opportunities for youth to engage in outdoor experiential learning. Extension also helps support, sustain, and grow the food-based economy across the entire state of Maine. In addition, we provide valuable statewide programming in nutrition education, healthy families and communities and within the aquaculture industry. We also partner with other organizations and programs to provide additional educational opportunities to a diversity of audiences across this state.



Extension faculty and staff across the state have also contributed to significant digital outreach this past year. Our Extension website (extension.umaine.edu), which is a combination of 57 interconnected websites, received 3.1 million views in 2021. We have over 700 research-based publications that are available as free downloads at extension.umaine.edu/publications. And in this past year, we had more than 5,000 customers register for workshops, events, webinars and more through our online registration system.

UMaine Cooperative Extension is determined to make a positive difference in our areas of excellence and beyond for the citizens of Maine. Explore our website, visit a county office, and contact our enthusiastic workforce.

— Hannah Carter, Dean

University of Maine Cooperative Extension's 2022 Digital Presence

Oxford County Agriculture and Horticulture

Oxford County 4-H Positive Youth Development

Sustainable Community and Economic Development

Financial Support

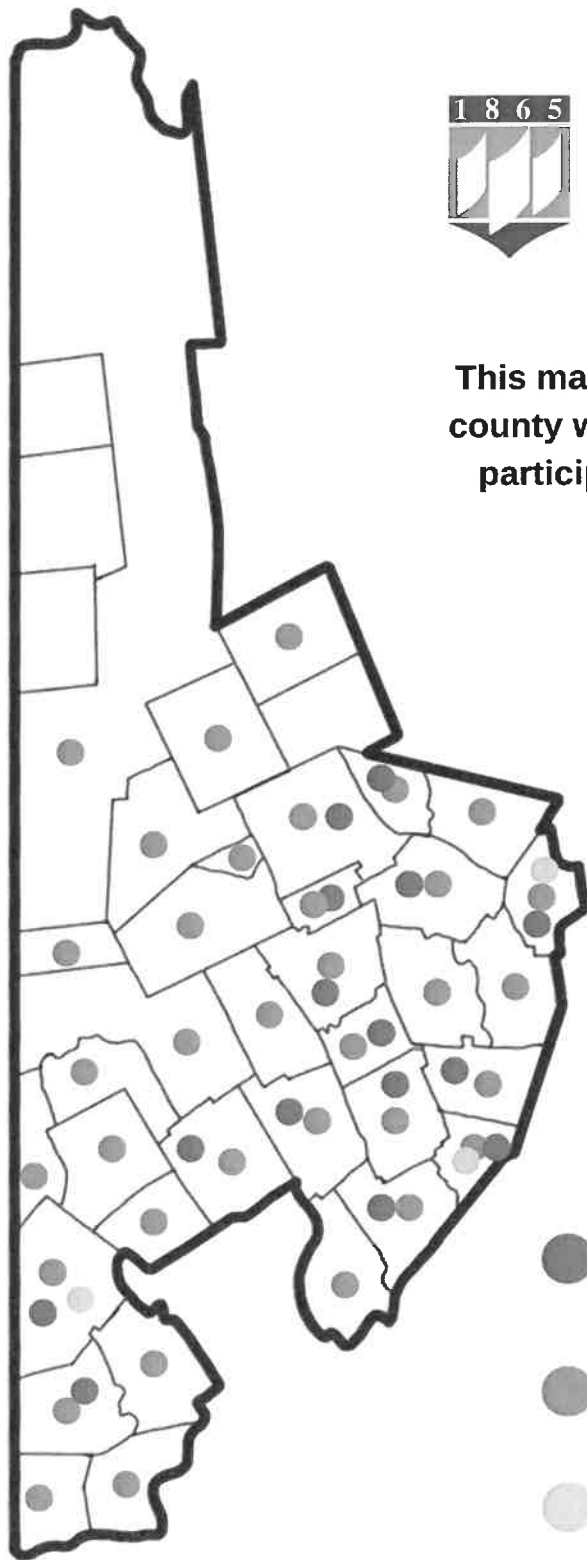
County Highlights

*Putting university research to work in Maine homes, businesses,
farms, and communities for over 100 years*



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MAINE
Cooperative Extension

This map identifies the areas of the county where our programming and participants are currently active.



- 4-H Clubs & After-School Programs
- Agriculture & Horticulture: Workshop, Outreach and Technical Assistance
- Homemaker Groups

COUNTY HIGHLIGHTS—

Commercial Agriculture and Home Horticulture

UMaine Extension in Oxford County gives local residents, farmers, and businesses access to the resources and expertise of the University of Maine. Through educational programs, publications, workshops, and events, UMaine Extension delivers unbiased, research-based information to Oxford County citizens.

July 2022 – June 2023

- Responded to over **340 technical assistance requests**, including home gardener questions and in-depth farmer consultations.
- **16 Master Gardener Volunteers completed 650 volunteer hours, valued at \$18,750*** on projects focusing on educating youth and adults about growing their own food, horticultural therapy and creating pollinator habitat with native plants. **Volunteer hours valued at \$28.89 in Maine per Value of Volunteer Time report, 2022.*
- **In-person and workshops reached 375 attendees.** Topics covered a range of home garden and farming topics including composting, raising livestock, native plants, and more.
- **Services we offer:** general farming and gardening advice, one-on-one consultations for farmers, soil testing and recommendations, insect, tick, plant and plant disease identification, veterinary diagnostic services, farm business planning consultations and much more.
- **Newsletters:** Oxford County Farm and Garden Newsletter as well as statewide bi-weekly Maine Farm News.
- **Lending library:** As a service to Oxford County farmer, we have hay, forage and soil testing equipment as well as pesticide applicator study materials available to borrow.

Our services are available to every citizen of Oxford County and may be accessed in-person at our office, as well as through our website and Facebook page, phone and email consultations, site visits, classes, and publications.



Master Gardener Volunteers (top left clockwise); Rebecca Goodenough, Nancy Donovan, Jill Rathburn, Rebecca Long (staff), and Joan Beal take a break from maintaining a native plant demonstration garden



Monarch caterpillars on common milkweed in the native plant demonstration garden at the Oxford County Cooperative Extension office, designed and maintained by Master Gardener Volunteers.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHTS —

4-H Positive Youth Development

For more than a century, 4-H has been a leader in positive youth development. 4-H emphasizes the importance of building the life skills needed to be successful adults through programs focusing on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), healthy lifestyles, youth community action, youth aspirations, service, leadership and the arts.

Club Program: Oxford County has **over 170 youth and 59 volunteers** currently enrolled in 4-H. These numbers include independent members, as well as 22 clubs throughout the county. Many members are also homeschool families who use 4-H resources as part of their teaching curriculum. Clubs are volunteer led and provide youth with a positive adult mentor. Current clubs include projects related to sheep, swine, robotics, gardening, cooking, crafting, and more.

Events and Field Trips: **145 youth and their families** attended Oxford 4-H events this year including educational tours of Boston, the Gray Wildlife Park, a local farm, the Big E Fair and June Jamboree.

Our most successful educational programming being the Oxford County June Jamboree had over **70 attendees**. Youth and adults collaborated on learning valuable skills such as sheering, animal care and prepared animals to be shown at local fairs like Oxford County Fair and Fryeburg Fair.

4-H staff also participated in two teacher training workshops with SAD 17 and Rumford staff members, provided after school programming with Waterford summer school, and conducted nature-based education research within Agnes Gray school's 5th grade class.

Oxford County 4-H has continued its lending library this year which is stocked with hands on, experiential curriculum and resources on various topics. **20 Oxford County educational resources** were utilized by teachers, afterschool providers, volunteers, and families.



4-H youth gather around a 4-H volunteer demonstrating how to properly shear sheep for fair exhibits at Oxford County June Jamboree.



4-H youth gather around craft supplies creating nature inspired art during the Nature Art Series last fall.

University of Maine Cooperative Extension's 2022 Digital Presence

Website

University of Maine Cooperative Extension's website at extension.umaine.edu – a combination of **57 interconnected websites** consisting of nearly **12,000 pages** – received **3.1 million pageviews** from visitors in the 12 months between January 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022. Visitors searched for and found information on a wide variety of topics, including planting in Maine, small business management, harvest and storage of tree fruits, and tractor safety. Image galleries helped users identify pests, plant diseases, and weeds. A wide variety of interactive web forms allowed users to request assistance, presentations, newsletters, and updates; report volunteer hours; make donations; and respond to surveys. Nearly **54,000 web visits were referred from social media**.

Social Media

More than **43,000 followers** followed or were subscribed to UMaine Extension's **55 county and program-specific social media accounts** on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, and TikTok. We hosted or co-hosted **92 Facebook Events that reached 127,731 users**. Nearly **700 educational videos** were available to visitors on our 14 YouTube playlists; many were also embedded in our web pages. Extension's YouTube videos were the most watched on the University of Maine Channel, which received **1.2 million views and 66,000+ hours** of watch time. Top videos included Lobster Cooking and Eating, How to Seal Windows for Winter and Summer, How to Prune a Blueberry Bush, How Do I Prune Raspberries, and Tick Removal.

Publications

More than **700 research-based publications** on a broad range of topics were available for free download at extension.umaine.edu/publications. Popular fact sheets, such as *How to Tap Maple Trees and Make Maple Syrup*, *Sodium Content of Your Food*, and *Guide to First-Time Horse Ownership* received tens of thousands of pageviews each. New publications in 2022 included *Tarping in the Northeast: A Guide for Small Farms*, *Establishing and Using a Support Network for Individuals with Disabilities*, *Hawkweed in Maine Lawns*, *Growing Wild Blueberries in the Home Garden*, and *Calf and Heifer Management in New England*.

Online Registration, Brightspace, and MailChimp

Nearly **2,642 customers registered for workshops, events, webinars, and more** through our online registration system.

Over **500 participants took Extension courses online via BrightSpace**. Classes included Master Gardener Volunteer training, Maine Gardener Training, Growing Hemp, Soil Health, Boots-2-Bushels, Food Sanitation, Maine Horticulture Apprenticeship, 4-H STEM Ambassador Training, and So, You Want to Farm in Maine.

Extension also collaborated with three partners across the University of Maine System to develop, test, and launch a new e-commerce platform, Discover.maine.edu, that will be used for non-academic course enrollment.

More than **11,032 subscribers received over 75,500 e-notifications via MailChimp**.



Maine Food System



Maine Harvest for Hunger Fights Food Insecurity

Relevance — Maine has the second highest rate of food insecurity in New England and ranks 35th in the nation. The USDA estimates that 9.5% of Maine households are food insecure. Nationally, 12.5% of households with children under the age of 18 and 9.5% of households where an older adult was living alone experienced food insecurity in 2021. With hunger affecting people of all walks of life in all communities, it is essential that every measure be taken to feed our neighbors in times of need.

Response — Since 2000, UMaine Extension's Maine Harvest for Hunger (MHH) program has mobilized gardeners, farmers, businesses, schools, and civic groups to grow, glean, and donate fresh produce to food security agencies. Our work involves training volunteers, developing partnerships with farms and organizations, organizing and leading volunteer opportunities, maintaining databases of sites accepting produce donations, and building awareness of the extent, causes, and impacts of food insecurity.

Results — In 2022, 262 MHH volunteers grew, gleaned, and distributed 296,150 pounds of produce, valued at \$568,608, to 204 food security agencies located throughout the state. We partnered with 131 farms and community gardens on these efforts. Notably this year, our teams gathered and distributed 14,000 pounds of apples from orchards throughout the state. These farms reach out to us to annually organize gleaning events, knowing our trained volunteers can be trusted to safely and efficiently get their apples to where they're needed most. Old Town Elementary School's free farm stand offered 6,300 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables gathered on-site and gleaned from area farms. Open to the public in an easily accessible site, this low-barrier program reached hundreds of individuals in a limited resource community. From backyards to farms to school gardens, MHH is enhancing access to healthy food and offering volunteers a truly meaningful way to engage with their community. Since 2000, MHH participants have distributed more than 3.5 million pounds of food to citizens grappling with hunger.

Master Gardener Volunteers Help Increase Food Security and Lift Communities

Relevance — Public and private gardens are important tools for enhancing physical and mental health. They also play a key role in sustaining the health and vitality of our natural communities. Successful collaborative gardening initiatives are an important tool for enhancing public health and providing meaningful community engagement opportunities by increasing access to locally grown food, providing a

safe space to connect with neighbors, and offering learning opportunities outside the classroom. Supports such as volunteer leaders, educational resources, and manual labor are key contributors to the success of these projects. Extension trains and supports Master Gardener Volunteers, who help extend university knowledge to their neighbors through the teaching of sustainable gardening practices.

Response — The Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV) program provides participants with a minimum of 64 hours of in-depth training in the art and science of horticulture. Trainees receive current, research-based information from our educators and industry experts and are connected with service projects that match their interests, skill sets, and availability. MGV coordinators facilitate relationships between MGVs and community partners, assisting with needs assessment, program planning, risk management, and problem-solving. MGVs play a vital role in connecting communities with educational resources through community events, social media, and programming.

Results — In 2022, 664 volunteers donated 30,262 hours to a variety of educational and food security projects throughout the state, including 23 school gardens, 16 demonstration gardens, 12 horticulture therapy gardens, 13 pollinator and native gardens, and 56 food security projects. Their efforts reached 1,744 youth and adults through direct programming and 7,452 Maine residents indirectly through outreach, news articles, TV features, and more. Many volunteers enter the MGV program with the goal of improving their gardening skills for their own personal benefit and leave surprised by how deeply involved and passionate they become about community projects.

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program Increases Food Security and Healthy Behaviors

Relevance — In 2021, 11.5% of Maine people lived in poverty, and in 2020, 10.4% of households experienced food insecurity. In 2020, 31% of Maine adults were obese. The combination of high rates of food insecurity and the complexity of the causes of obesity increases the risk of developing chronic diseases and reducing the quality of life for Maine people. High incidence of chronic diseases continues to raise health care costs for the nation and strains current health promotion programs.

Response — To improve the food security and diet quality of Maine's low-income parents and caregivers, UMaine Extension delivers education through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). The goals are to improve behaviors related to diet quality and daily physical activity, and to use food resources management practices to plan and shop for healthy meals and snacks. Program outcomes are measured for all adults using validated pre/post program surveys.

Results— In 2022, 233 adults participated in Maine EFNEP, and the education delivered reached a total of 958 individuals in program families. Sixty percent completed pre- and post- surveys showing these results:

- 38% report eating fruit more often each day
- 42% report eating vegetables more often each day
- 29% report drinking soda less often
- 43% report planning meals before shopping more often
- 33% report making a list before shopping more often
- 45% report using a weekly or monthly food spending plan.

Seafood Processing Education and Validation Helps Ensure Safety of Maine Seafood Products

Relevance — The Maine seafood industry adds more than \$2 billion to the state economy annually. Maine seafood producers must complete training in seafood hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) principles as required by U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulation. Processors that

are cooking products must complete a thermal processing validation performed by a thermal process authority.

Response — Extension provides education and process validation services to seafood processors in Maine and the United States to ensure the proper processing of products to prevent foodborne illness. This service allows processors to meet FDA requirements and sell safe seafood products. In 2022, Extension delivered eight seafood HACCP trainings and provided six thermal process validations.

Results — More than 200 seafood processors participated in the trainings, and more than 40 participants reported that they assembled and updated seafood HACCP plans to safely produce seafood products and meet FDA regulations. In addition, the six thermal processing validation studies completed for three processing plants allow the plants' workers to safely produce more than 2,000,000 pounds of seafood products annually with an estimated value of more than \$20 million.

Helping Culinary Arts Instructors Build Agriculture Literacy through an Immersive Culinary Experience

Relevance — The USDA 2018 Food Away from Home data reveal that since 2010 more than 50% of meals are eaten away from home. Restaurants are a driving force in Maine's economy, providing 63,900 jobs, which represents 10% of Maine's employment. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need for a sustainable local agriculture-based food system within the restaurant and food service industry to support reliable, stable food access.

Response — UMaine Extension and Maine Ag in the Classroom collaborated to create the Building Agriculture Literacy through an Immersive Culinary Experience project to help career and technical education (CTE) culinary arts instructors increase their agricultural literacy and enhance the connectedness between agriculture and food service. This project seeks to create a skilled and educated workforce that will increase the usage of Maine-grown, -processed, and -produced foods in their programs and careers. Project activities included a weeklong Immersive Culinary Arts Summer Institute for CTE culinary arts instructors, hands-on experience in local food procurement practices, demonstrations of food system lessons, educational field trips, financial support for experiential activities through their existing school restaurants, participation in a University of Maine Local Foods Competition, and coaching during the school year.

Results — At the program midpoint, we had reached 74% of Maine's high school CTE culinary arts programs with at least one of our efforts. More than 800 students statewide have engaged in classroom/kitchen visits to learn about dietary restrictions, consumer food preferences, and local foods, and complete a local food cooking challenge to meet a dietary food preference, thus demonstrating their proficiency in local foods and dietary restrictions. Thirteen schools received \$28,000 in funds through a mini-grant program to support activities to develop their knowledge base of agricultural literacy. The Culinary Arts Summer Institute reached nearly 30% of Maine's culinary arts chef instructors. This immersive event involved experiential learning opportunities at multiple Maine food processing and production sites across the state.

The program is contributing to the success of Maine's local food system by changing the way tomorrow's food professionals think about food. Through the project's emphasis on local food systems through strategic career-readiness, experiential education, and connecting with local stakeholders (career and higher education), these students are gaining a realization of the importance and value of local foods. Our project requires CTE culinary arts programs selected for mini-grant funding to be engaged at the local level with stakeholders related to culinary arts and hospitality, including nonprofit organizations, community groups, private businesses, industry representatives, and higher education faculty and staff at Maine community colleges and universities. This type of community connectedness is fostering youth leadership and offering opportunities for students to develop a greater understanding of federal, state, and local food and agriculture policy and to network to make tangible connections for future careers.

Integrated Pest Management Saves Millions for Maine Potato and Fruit Tree Industries

Relevance — The potato industry is the largest agricultural sector in Maine, encompassing more than 530 businesses generating total sales of more than \$540 million with total employment of 6,150 jobs and a total income greater than \$233 million annually. The Maine potato crop, which in 2022 was 1.8 billion pounds, has its challenges from insects and pathogens alike. Costs to manage these pests can eat up profitability of the crop, and insecticide applications used to manage these pests can pose threats to the applicators, non-target species, and the environment. Additionally, Maine's tree fruit sector is vibrant, active, and growing.

Response — The University of Maine Cooperative Extension Diagnostic Research Laboratory provides pest identification and integrated pest management (IPM) education to commercial and home clients. IPM is a comprehensive approach to solving pest problems with the goal of providing safe, effective, economical, environmentally sound, and socially sensitive outcomes.

Extension's Potato IPM program worked with 270 farms to monitor pest populations in potato fields in northern and central Maine. Using insect traps and field scouting, farms were visited weekly during the growing season to determine pest population status, and growers were given field reports and up-to-date management recommendations. Data collected from the potato farms were shared with potato growers throughout the state, the northeastern states, and eastern Canada through a weekly newsletter with 456 subscribers.

Growers using the information available through the IPM program have been able to successfully manage potato pests using minimal pesticide applications, because sprays were used only when population data indicated a specific need for control. Yields were improved or pesticide sprays reduced, and due to less pest damage, profitability was maintained or improved.

Extension's Tree Fruits program staff developed and delivered research-based information on the production of tree fruit crops, primarily apples, through publications, workshops, meetings, farm visits, correspondence, and telephone consultations. We conduct annual meetings, including on preseason IPM in March and a summer tour in July. Periodic newsletters address current cultural practices and pest management strategies. We maintain applied research plantings in cooperation with the Maine Agricultural & Forest Experiment Station.

Results — Each year, Extension's IPM research and identification efforts save Maine's potato industry an estimated \$10 million in losses avoided, yields increased, and pesticide uses reduced. The IPM program saves Maine's fruit tree industry more than \$5 million in losses avoided and more than \$1 million in pesticide cost savings.

Supporting Maple Producers and Encouraging Workforce Development

Relevance — Maine has the third largest maple production in the United States, behind Vermont and New York. Maine's maple industry has an estimated annual statewide economic contribution of more than \$48 million in output, 805 full- and part-time jobs, and more than \$25 million in labor income. Maine's maple industry annually produces more than 700,000 gallons of maple syrup.

Response — In 2004, a grant from the Maine Agriculture Center funded a collaborative effort by UMaine Extension, University of New Hampshire Extension, and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets to create an International Maple Syrup Institute (IMSI) Maple Grading School. To meet ongoing demand, the Grading School has been held annually and has been adopted by the IMSI as a signature event aligned with the IMSI mission to protect the quality and integrity of maple products. School attendees are from all areas of the industry: producers, bulk buyers and syrup packers, Department of Agriculture inspectors, Extension personnel, and chefs. Extension's maple education programs provide

producers with resources about international grade standards, maple grading techniques, quality control, and food safety in the production process. A revamped UMaine Extension Maple Syrup Production website contains information on access to financial and business management resources, maple quality control, labor management, and expanded information for beginning producers.

Results — In 2022,

- 1,192 members of the public learned about the maple industry, syrup grades, and diverse uses of syrup through direct contact and through podcasts
- 116 beginning or backyard sugarmakers participated in four Maple Sugarmaking 101 courses led by our team
- 32 commercial maple syrup producers gained expertise with grading and quality control of maple syrup
- a six-week 4-H club engaged 25 youth, ages 9–16, including an in-person workshop at a Maine maple sugar house.

Youth learned about tree ages, identification, versatility of commercial and ecosystem benefits, the diversity of forest-related careers, and tapping maple trees. Youth interacted with forest industry professionals and received kits for accompanying hands-on activities, including tree cookie ornaments, identification books, maple candies, and maple syrup thickness and taste samples.

For 19 years, the Grading School has helped promote the wholesome image of the maple industry and shown that its participants are high quality and careful producers of unique maple products. The continued success of the school and its participants helps promote the exceptional image of both the maple industry and its producers who create high-quality products. The perpetuation of the school provides an excellent platform for industry discussion and education about maple products, grading, and quality issues concerning pure maple syrup. The school has received media attention including news articles by the Associated Press and National Public Radio, as well as local television and print media.

Home Horticulture Programs Help Gardeners Increase Yields and Efficiency and Reduce Inputs

Relevance — Every day, Maine gardeners are deciding on whether and how to manage pests, which fertilizers to use and how much, which plants to grow, methods to cultivate the soil, and how to use water resources to maintain landscapes. Nearly every residential site has a landscape that requires maintenance, and decisions made in these sites can have a significant impact on our natural resources. Home gardener success also results in improved food security and has an economic role in our green industry.

Response — In 2022, home horticulture programming directly reached 8,650 adults and 733 youth through more than 365 hours of educational programs, both in-person and virtual. This included 4,052 questions, received via email, phone calls, in-person events, and walk-ins, that were answered for home gardeners. Garden-related videos, newsletters, newspaper columns, and publications from Cooperative Extension indirectly reached an additional 49,679 home gardeners.

Results — As a result of Extension programs, participants reported using Extension to identify pest problems and determine research-based management strategies; develop a new garden or expand an existing one; increase garden yields and consumption of home-grown food; adopt sustainable gardening practices, including techniques to improve soil quality and practices that improve efficiency, reduce inputs, and negative impacts; adopt and maintain integrated pest management strategies; and adopt water-saving techniques.

Maine Compost Schools Train Respondents for Animal Disease Outbreaks and Disaster Mortalities

Relevance — There is a national need for compost education as we move toward a more environmentally sustainable society. Composting is a management tool that a variety of sectors can use to reduce waste volume through decomposition and stabilization. Composting can reduce food waste, manage animal mortalities, stop the spread of disease, and create a valuable and safe product that can be used in the agricultural, horticultural, and environmental engineering sectors.

Response — UMaine Extension, as a member of the Maine Compost School team, offers weeklong training multiple times a year focused on comprehensive composting training and composting as a means to manage animal mortalities through general agricultural production, disease outbreaks, or disaster mortalities. Participants in these trainings are tested on their composting knowledge and receive recognized certification.

Results — The nation's longest continually running compost education program (27 years), the MCS has graduated more than 1,000 students from most of the 50 US states and over 40 countries from around the world. Participants have used the training as professional development and as a way to bring a more robust and rounded set of composting skills back to various businesses to improve understanding, efficiency, and profitability. More than 75 participants have completed our Carcass Management Training Programs have passed the initial requirements to become a Composting Subject Matter Expert (SME) and may deploy during animal mortality outbreaks due to diseases such as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and other disaster events. Fourteen participants responded to the 2022 HPAI outbreak and are now full compost SMEs.

Results of the Carcass Training Program include the establishment of a trained community/team that is prepared to rapidly and expertly respond to animal disasters; understands core compost concepts that can be applied to many different situations; have competencies in carcass mortality management and have resource materials they can share with others; understands how to assess and troubleshoot unique issues to effectively use compost as a disposal tool.

Teaching Climate Adaptation to Farmers and Service Providers

Relevance — Current and projected changes in weather present new opportunities for Maine agriculture, such as longer growing seasons, but also increased risks, such as spring frosts, summer droughts, and more frequent and intense rainfall. In many cases, climate adaptation practices (e.g., irrigation and weather-based decision support tools) require new knowledge and skills, not just for the farmer but also for their service providers.

Response — UMaine Extension initiated a three-year Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) professional development program to increase the ability of agricultural service providers to help farmers adopt climate adaptation practices, with each focused on a set of specific practices. The aim is not to create topic experts, but to help trainees become well-informed advisors who, in the context of their current positions, will help farmers frame the right questions, address relevant considerations, evaluate options, and connect with the most appropriate resources and experts.

Results — Agricultural service providers from Extension, nonprofits, state agencies, conservation districts, and the University of Maine increased their knowledge, skills, and confidence in providing information and recommendations about irrigation and other practices to cope with the increased frequency of dry spells and drought. Participants: 1) learned about water sourcing, water rules and regulations, types of irrigation systems, irrigation management and efficiency, and drought and water monitoring through farm tours and monthly webinars, 2) applied their knowledge by working in teams with farmers to develop farm plans for reducing the risks associated with increased drought and dry spells, and 3) co-developed the "Directory of Resources on Irrigation in Maine," a curated list of more than 50 online resources covering all aspects of irrigation that will be posted on the UMaine Extension website for farmers and agricultural service providers to use.

Extension Shares PFAS Resources for Farmers

Relevance — “PFAS” is the short name for a large class of harmful, fluorinated synthetic chemicals that have recently been found in the environment, often at low levels. Higher levels are sometimes found near airfields and factories that have used fire-fighting foams, or on land where certain waste materials or biosolids containing PFAS have been used. Crops may be grown on soil containing these PFAS, but how much of these chemicals are in the crop depends on the type of crop, what part of the crop is edible, soil properties, and PFAS levels in the soil. These chemicals may end up in the milk and meat of animals fed crops such as hay containing PFAS. These chemicals can also move from the soil into the groundwater and into well water. Consuming contaminated milk, meat, plants, or water are potential ways people can be exposed to these chemicals.

Response — The state of Maine has allocated significant funding to address issues related to PFAS and is dedicated to supporting landowners who are affected by land application of wastewater biosolids and fire-fighting foams, as well as Department of Defense sites, landfills, or other PFAS sources.

Results — UMaine Extension offers a dynamic set of resources about on-farm PFAS contamination available online to the public in one location. [Guide to Investigating PFAS Risk on Your Farm](#) is a comprehensive collection of resources about PFAS contamination in Maine. Topics include information on the sources of PFAS contamination, steps to determining risks and mitigation options for farms, and Maine’s response to contamination at agricultural sites. The website is continually updated as the research and resulting information evolves. The resources are from multiple Maine state agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry; Health and Human Services; and Environmental Protection; and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Supporting organizations contributing information include UMaine Extension, Maine Farmland Trust, and Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association.

So You Want to Farm in Maine Program Educates Potential New Farmers

Relevance — Current farmers thinking about changing farm enterprises and new farmers interested in starting a farm may lack the skills, knowledge, and confidence to investigate their options to start, adapt, and maintain a profitable land-based business. Major issues farmers and potential farmers (whether full-time or part-time) need to overcome include access to capital, understanding of rules and regulations affecting agriculture operations, and marketing options.

Response — Since 2015, 349 people have participated through face-to-face, video-linked, webinar, live-streamed, Zoom, and archived sessions of the So You Want to Farm in Maine program to learn about agriculture enterprise selection, business planning, record-keeping, market research, regulations, and resource identification. Each class is designed to be interactive and features many guest speakers, including agriculture service providers from an array of sectors and those who are currently farming successfully.

The 2022 series offered a different approach. Participants included 44 aspiring farmers as well as 13 UMaine undergraduates, providing the opportunity for richer discussions and connections between those interested in starting Maine farms imminently and students with a variety of backgrounds and experience. The undergraduates were teamed with aspiring farmers to create draft business plans and enterprise budgets over the course of five weeks.

Results — Knowledge change was assessed by a post-program evaluation. Participants responding to a program evaluation reported having moderate to considerable knowledge and understanding of these topics following the program: goal setting and farm business management plan development; enterprise budget development and evaluating profitability; land and asset assessment; marketing and marketing research; record-keeping (production and financial); estate planning and insurance; permits, licenses, and regulations; credible sources of production information and pricing; taxes (local, state, and federal); and financial management. In 2022, income from all plans developed for the class by students and farmers

totaled more than \$2 million. All participants had the opportunity to receive USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) borrower training credit; in 2022, 22 participants chose to get the FSA certification.

Soil Health Course Educates Farmers

Relevance — Soil health is of great interest to agricultural producers and a critical component of their success, yet farmers have limited access to in-depth training in the topic.

Response — Extension designed a new, 5-week online soil health short course for farmers to improve their understanding of soil health science, principles, and practical management strategies. Course topics included soil biology and soil organic matter, physical and chemical properties of soil health, soil health strategies and practices, cover cropping, reduced tillage practices, crop rotation, soil amendments, and soil health testing.

Results — Twenty participants completed the course, including nine farmers, five aspiring farmers, four gardeners, and two farm advisors. Fourteen said they intended to change a soil management practice as a result of what they learned, and 10 submitted soil for a free soil health test and received a follow-up consultation with one of the instructors.

Marine Extension Team Supports Community Sustainability/Resilience, Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Ecosystem Health

Relevance — Climate change is requiring Maine communities to build the capacity to make informed decisions on the management of coastal and marine resources that promote ecological and economic sustainability.

Response: Maine's Marine Extension Team (MET), a collaboration of University of Maine Cooperative Extension and Sea Grant, continued to help communities gain the capacity to make informed decisions on the management of coastal and marine resources that promote ecological and economic sustainability. MET members worked with communities to address problems and respond to opportunities in four major areas: ecosystem health; sustainable coastal communities; fisheries and aquaculture, and coastal community resilience.

Results: Our collaboration benefits Maine broadly by marrying Extension's outreach and programming experience with Sea Grant's marine research and knowledge of coastal communities and issues. Through research and outreach the Marine Extension Team builds the capacity of coastal communities and marine industries to make informed decisions on the management of coastal and marine resources that promote ecological and economic sustainability. In 2022, our projects included *Building Your Virtual Facilitation Skills*, a training series in partnership with UMaine Extension educators in four states, last year training 82 professionals and community members in Maine; *Advancing Scallop Aquaculture in Maine*, a partnership with UMaine and Bigelow Laboratory scientists, Coastal Enterprises, Inc., Maine Aquaculture Association, and Maine scallop farmers to develop a bioeconomic model for scallop farming and develop new scallop aquaculture products; *Tools for Maine's climate-readiness practitioners and coastal communities*, as part of our work with the Climate Change Adaptation Providers Network; *Beach Profile Monitoring*, working with more than 150 volunteers collecting beach profile data and providing valuable information for municipal officials, and with the Maine Climate Council's Scientific and Technical subcommittee and to inform *Maine Won't Wait*, a climate action plan for the state, *The Maine Oyster Trail*, continuing to support Maine's oyster farmers with the first digital and interactive oyster trail in the U.S., partnering with more than 80 Maine oyster farms and businesses to drive coordinated tourism to Maine's working waterfronts; *Aquaculture in Shared Waters*, continuing to support fishermen and others to start aquaculture ventures, with a 12-week introductory courses including curriculum related to collaboration opportunities with the tourism and culinary industries, and incorporating the results of Sea Grant-supported UMaine research on aquaculture site selection; *The Alliance for Maine's Marine Economy* that facilitates innovation and growth, allowing seafood businesses and the marine technology sector to

develop new products, increase revenue, and create jobs. A MET professional has coordinated the Alliance since January 2018, and cumulatively, Alliance investment recipients have reported that their awards and Maine Sea Grant's Alliance extension programming and support have resulted in 215 new and 211 expanded jobs, and 105 new contracts and research projects.



4-H POSITIVE Youth Development



4-H Ambassadors Mentoring Students toward STEM Careers

Relevance — Developing Maine youth science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) literacy is vital to ensuring that our state continues to thrive economically and socially. Given the remote and diverse communities where Maine youth live, informal education can help minimize inequities in rural youth STEM education and career pipelines. Future career opportunities in Maine will depend heavily on STEM skills, whether in the growing fields of healthcare and engineering, or in positions requiring technical skills, such as construction, and maintenance of transportation and energy systems.

Response — 4-H STEM Ambassadors are trained University of Maine System students enrolled as 4-H volunteers who facilitate hands-on STEM activities with youth 8–14 years old throughout Maine. Since 2014, our 4-H STEM Ambassadors program has enrolled and trained more than 500 UMaine system students who have facilitated in-person, hands-on learning experiences fostering youth STEM enjoyment, literacy, and identity, reaching more than 6,000 Maine youth in classrooms, libraries, and after-school clubs across the state. In fall 2020, Extension redesigned the program to be virtual, including a training, mentoring, and experiential STEM programming.

Results — The shift to a virtual program allowed for multicampus student teams and increased access for more distant community partners regardless of local program model (remote, in-person, hybrid). In 2021 the program reached more than 300 students, grades 3–8, across 18 sites with the help of 39 volunteer Ambassadors and staff. In 2022 program staff spent the first part of the year upgrading the virtual programming and then reached another 89 students at seven sites with the help of 11 Ambassadors. Through this program, youth ages 8–14 come to view these Ambassadors as mentors and leaders in their community while also developing skills in STEM through hands-on activities and becoming connected to research, resources, and scientists at Maine’s public universities.

Summer of Science STEM Enrichment for Children Experiencing Poverty and Immigrant and Refugee Families

Relevance — Children experiencing poverty have less access to enrichment activities, contributing to an achievement gap between them and their more affluent classmates. This gap accelerates during summer months, when children from low resource backgrounds tend to fall behind in grade equivalency compared to their peers. This condition can be especially acute for children living in public housing neighborhoods, including many of Maine’s immigrant and refugee families in the metro areas of Portland and Lewiston. Access to STEM enrichment activities leads to improved academic success, more educational attainment,

and better employment opportunities.

Response — UMaine Extension created the 4-H Summer of Science (SOS) in 2012 to: 1) improve youth aspirations in STEM, 2) introduce STEM careers to youth, and 3) mitigate summer learning loss and the achievement gap. Over time, the SOS program has developed to include teens as teachers and college interns as teacher mentors. In 2022, UMaine 4-H faculty and staff designed four STEM lessons that were taught in seven southern Maine communities at 15 sites, including Boys & Girls Clubs, the YMCA, summer lunch programs, public housing centers, and libraries. There were 153 adult volunteers and summer staff who taught 535 youth in the field of environmental DNA (eDNA). Forty-eight percent of youth participants were non-white (225 of them of black or African American origin).

SOS is unique among STEM programs in using teens to be the teachers; SOS is often the first paid position for our teens. These teens were trained to deliver lessons, understand content, manage classrooms, motivate young learners, and work with community partners. Seven college interns were recruited, trained, and tasked with mentoring the teen teachers, thereby creating an integrated generational approach to delivering community programming. The college interns and teen teachers gained workforce skills such as time management, leadership, public speaking, problem-solving, ethics, and teamwork. Funding for stipends for the teens and college students came from USDA NIFA, Portland Public Schools, and the UMaine EPSCoR program.

The SOS program focuses on programming where youth already are (in neighborhoods, libraries, and community sites) and uses positive 4-H youth development practices to reduce barriers to STEM activities. By engaging in Summer of Science activities, the 4-H youth are well poised to return to their academic school year with reduced summer learning loss and an increased interest in science.

Results — Research by UMaine faculty shows that well-designed STEM lessons delivered by near peers (teens and college students) supports STEM career aspirations and leads to better content knowledge. Research also shows that youth involved in 4-H are more likely to pursue future courses or a career in science, engineering, or computer technology, which can lead to improved employment opportunities. For Maine elementary school youth, SOS supports narrowing their STEM achievement gap during summer months, and for the teens trained to deliver programming, it fosters their career development, leadership abilities, and sense of responsibility. Teen teachers in the SOS program report improved socio-emotional skills and applicable workforce skills, as well as increased resiliency.

4-H Aquaponics Project Sparking Youth Interest and Workforce Development

Relevance — Maine communities have a long tradition of harvesting healthy seafood and taking care of the environment. Maine aquaculturists are leading suppliers of fresh, sustainable, and locally grown seafood, and as a result, aquaculture is one of the fastest growing industries in the state. Maine aquaculture generates more than \$137 million in sales output, 1,975 full- and part-time jobs, and \$56 million in labor income annually, and there is an increasing need to grow the local workforce to support the growing industry.

As a global leader in the aquaculture industry, Maine is uniquely positioned to engage youth in aquaculture education programs that will help grow and strengthen local businesses and the economy. A workforce shortage in Maine's aquaculture industry has been an obstacle to growth for many businesses and could stunt the industry's tremendous growth potential.

The recirculating aquaculture system sector is booming, with five large-scale companies recently investing in Maine, bringing economic benefits to rural communities. Hancock County in particular has a thriving aquaculture industry due to its coastal location and access to the UMaine Center for Cooperative Aquaculture Research (CCAR). To support this growing industry, effective workforce development programs must provide the flow of talent needed to create and sustain a robust aquaculture industry. With roots in agriculture and animal science, the 4-H Youth Development Program of UMaine Extension is a natural fit for aquaculture advancement programs.

Response — In 2022, Hancock County 4-H partnered with CCAR and the Aquaculture Research Institute to expand the 4-H Aquaponics project, an experiential learning program for K–12 youth that includes learning experiences in introductory aquaponic systems and design, fish husbandry, aquaponic gardening, cooking and nutrition, and more. Youth practice important life skills such as record-keeping, problem-solving, food safety, collaboration/teamwork, science and math literacy. They can participate in the project from home, from their classroom, or any other youth group setting, such as after-school programs, summer camps, etc.

Results — Youth participants gained a deep understanding of novel, complex systems, while practicing important life skills such as resiliency and troubleshooting. They also developed skills that are sought after by the aquaculture industry (e.g., basic knowledge of fish biology, understanding water quality issues, project management, teamwork, and more), specifically related to recirculating aquaculture systems. The 4-H Aquaponics project is being lauded as a viable workforce development program for the aquaculture sector in Maine and nationally. It was externally funded for 2022 and beyond and received the 2021 Denise Miller National 4-H Innovator Award from the National Association of Extension 4-H Youth Development Professionals.

NorthStar Program Raises Student Aspirations

Relevance — Many employers now require bachelor's degrees for an increasingly wider range of jobs, and there is a significant achievement and mental health gap for rural Maine youth. According to the 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, one in five Maine students have experienced more than four adverse childhood experiences that significantly impact health and behavior outcomes. The percent of Oxford County residents with a bachelor's degree (20.6%) is far below state and national averages. Isolation, lack of social capital, and access to important resources are related challenges for these rural youth.

Response — Based in rural western Maine, NorthStar is a 4-H mentoring program that raises youth aspirations via long-term adult and peer relationships, part of a statewide network called Aspirations Incubator (AI). Students are recruited in seventh grade, referred by a teacher or parent, and are mentored through graduation. Cohorts are formed by grade level and meet monthly to plan and execute yearly "core trips," which include community service, cultural exchange, outdoor adventure, college visits, and career shadowing. NorthStar offers many other activities based on student interest and community need, and refers students to local employment.

Results — The program's first six years have been promising. Our first cohort is about to graduate from high school, with 90% planning to go to college this fall. All of these students report feeling more connected to their community, and 75% of them report a positive change in their relationship with adults and peers because of NorthStar. NorthStar staff and volunteers have acted as frontline support for teens in the SAD44 community, providing a much-needed bridge to available support services and direct support in numerous crisis situations. More than 70% of students in the program reported experiencing positive growth on measures related to learning interest and critical thinking. AI students were half as likely to be chronically absent compared with their peers, and more likely to exceed academic expectations. The majority of AI students reported improvements in their peer and adult relationships each year. In Year 4, 89% of eighth graders in Cohort 3 agreed that the program had helped them to feel connected to their community, and 86% said they have people to talk with when they feel lonely.

4-H Summer Camp and Learning Centers

Connecting Youth to the Outdoors and Building Community

Relevance — Research has shown that positive social and emotional learning experiences can significantly impact youth development and connecting youth to a positive adult role model decreases the risk for making unhealthy choices or engaging in risky behaviors. With youth spending more time connected to social media and other digital platforms resulting in isolation and sedentary indoor time, many youth suffer from obesity and/or ADHD, and some lack opportunities to develop positive interpersonal communication skills.

Response — UMaine Extension 4-H Camp and Learning Centers provide programs for youth ages 4-17, many from underserved populations, to have transformational experiences designed to develop a sense of place and belonging, and confidence in the outdoors. Our programs include both day and residential summer camps, onsite open-air classrooms for schools, and school-based programs, as well as adult programming and workshops. We have a well-developed virtual component to our programs that gives them added depth and maximizes accessibility. Our Learning Centers typically attract more than 2,500 youth each summer, and provide school programming for more than 6,000 students from 60+ Maine school groups.

Results — In 2022, our 4-H Camp and Learning Centers:

- Delivered year-round programming at the UMaine 4-H Learning Centers at Blueberry Cove, Bryant Pond, and Tanglewood, including programs in water ecology, forest ecology, wilderness survival, and conservation education.
- Collaborated with NH and VT developed and delivered an AgriSTEM curriculum virtually and in person among the 3 states to over 600 students, including summer campers at 4-H centers.
- Continued to support Telstar Freshman Academy at Bryant Pond, offering daily, yearlong, experiential learning designed to engage students in an outdoor setting.
- Continued to deliver the NorthStar Youth Mentoring program that connects young people with caring adults through community engagement, cultural exchange, and adventure challenge and leadership. The program is grounded in in-person contact, and also uses virtual contact for family and other activities.
- Continued, through Tech Wizards, to provide STEM education and service-learning to help youth learn life and workforce skills, improve academic performance, and aspire to pursue post-secondary education, leading to fulfilling careers and participation in their communities.
- At Greenland Point in Washington County, one of Maine's most impoverished counties, offered hands-on, ecology-focused education, and through scholarships making sure that price is not an obstacle to anyone who wants to come to camp.
- At summer camps and open-air classrooms, Tanglewood and Blueberry Cove offered programs tailored to community needs, including youth development programs for schools seeking to address the learning loss students had faced during the pandemic.



Sustainable Communities and Economic Development

Extension Services on Climate Change Help Guide Planning and Decision Making

Relevance — Climate services—using scientific information to help with decision making—are in increasing demand as climate change increasingly affects society and natural resources.

Response — Extension's climate services specialist, who also serves as Maine state climatologist, provides climate and weather expertise to stakeholders and the general public. This work encompasses the production and translation of climate information to facilitate decision-making, policy, and planning that ultimately seeks to advance a healthy environment and strong economy in Maine. The climate services program of the Maine Climate Office (MCO) has been designed to meet the climate, weather data, and information needs of Maine stakeholders. These services are delivered via multiple methods, including public presentations and media interviews, contributions to Extension newsletters, service on the Maine Climate Council's Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, contributions to climate reports and peer-reviewed publications, and by providing climate and weather data via the MCO website.

Results — Services provided through the MCO enhance public and stakeholder knowledge of climate and weather, and inform broader efforts to understand, adapt to, and mitigate climate change in Maine. The MCO website analytics show that since 2021, there have been more than 10,000 page views from 5,700 visitors, and the total number of visitors in Maine is 2,700 across 250 towns and cities.

Increasing Healthy Behaviors Through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

Relevance — Nationally, in 2020–2021, 17% of youth ages 10–17 were obese. In Maine, 14.6% of youth ages 10–17 were obese. Obesity rates alone do not provide a complete picture of the health of a population. Food insecurity—lack of consistent access to adequate, healthful foods—increases the risk of poor health of Maine's children in the short and long term. In Maine, one in six children (15.9%) under the age of 18 years are experiencing food insecurity. Of those 39,990 children, 32% of households do not qualify for federal food assistance programs and must rely on charitable organizations for supplemental food.

Response — To help lower childhood obesity rates, UMaine Extension Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) delivers education to Maine's low-income children to improve their knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes related to improving diet quality, increasing daily physical activity, and using food resource management practices to plan and shop for healthy meals and snacks. Program outcomes are measured for all youth ages 5–18 using validated pre/post program surveys.

Results — In fiscal year 2022, 1051 youth participated in Maine EFNEP. Youth participated in an average of seven educational sessions over four months. Eighty-three percent of youth participants completed a pre- and post- survey. As a result of participating in EFNEP:

- 83% of youth improved their ability to choose foods according to current dietary guidelines or improved nutrition knowledge.
- 56% of youth improved their daily physical activity practices.
- 43% of youth used safe food handling practices more often.
- 38% of youth improved their ability to prepare simple, nutritious, affordable food.

The Maine Agricultural Mediation Program Saves Money, Properties, and Relationships

Relevance — The Maine Agricultural Mediation Program (MAMP) partners with Maine organizations, staff at Extension, and the Farm Coaching program to provide facilitated conversations and mediations throughout the agricultural community. The types of problems that farms experience are widely known, yet general knowledge of the program is less so. Major issues include farm succession, farm financing, and workplace issues.

Response — The MAMP, part of the USDA Agricultural Mediation Program, provides alternative dispute resolution through mediation to farmers, their lenders, and others directly affected by the actions of certain USDA agencies; neighbor disputes; and workplace and family disagreements that affect the farm. Mediation is voluntary and confidential, and involves a trained, impartial mediator helping participants to resolve disagreements. In 2022, UMaine Extension hired a full-time professional to coordinate the MAMP, enabling the program to provide direct outreach to more than 25 organizations, provide training as part of a four-session series for service providers, promote the program, and work with others at UMaine to develop a mediation credential.

Results — The Farm Service Agency estimates the typical cost savings for a simple adverse decision case is \$10,000, and as much as \$40,000 can be spent on cases that extend over years. In addition to savings in staff time, savings from the MAMP to producers and/or participants include preservation of assets, properties, and relationships.

Parent Educators Encourage Reading as a Path to Build Language, Literacy, and Socio-emotional Skills in Children

Relevance — Research shows that reading aloud is one of the most important activities parents can do to help a child become a strong reader and set them on the path to success. Reading regularly with young children stimulates optimal patterns of brain development and strengthens parent-child relationships at a critical time in child development, which, in turn, builds language, literacy, and social-emotional skills that last a lifetime.

Response — UMaine Extension parent educators work from two offices covering five counties, and are part of a statewide network of Maine Families Home Visiting Programs. In 2022, 10 certified parent educators provided 1,949 home visits to 239 families living in five counties. Using the parents as teachers model, parent educators met with families in their homes and 1) provided them with current information on child development and parenting, 2) shared activity ideas and ways to engage and nurture their child's optimal development, and 3) provided connections and linkages to community resources. During each home visit parent educators offered book sharing opportunities and information about early literacy, including the importance of reading aloud. Parent educators provided free children's books to all enrolled families, including books in French, Lingala, and Spanish for families who are non-English-speaking. Book sharing was planned for each visit and high-quality children's books were provided each month to all participating families.

Results — Results collected show that 97% of enrolled children had a family member who reported that during a typical week they read, told stories, and/or sang songs with their child every day.

Extension Homemakers Meet Many Community Needs

Relevance — Many communities throughout Maine face poverty, and many families are considered food insecure. Budget cuts and inflation mean that every sector of community living is affected when resources are reduced.

Response — The Maine Extension Homemakers Council has clubs in Androscoggin-Sagadahoc, Aroostook, Cumberland, Franklin, Hancock, Oxford, Somerset, and York Counties. This volunteer group identified community needs and worked to contribute both financial and volunteer hours to community partners to meet the needs of Maine's most vulnerable citizens.

Results — In 2022, the Maine Extension Homemakers raised and donated \$58,994 to civic organizations, nonprofits, and individuals throughout Maine. They also provided 12,449 hours of volunteerism within their counties and communities. In all, their community impact was valued at \$377,140. The fingerprints of the efforts of the Maine Extension Homemakers can be seen in school libraries, at food pantries, in local town offices, with the Newborns in Need program, at the Home for Little Wanderers, at Hope and Justice Project shelters, in the back seats of state police cars, in hospitals and nursing homes, and in assisted living facilities. You will see marks of their volunteerism at animal shelters, at historical societies, and on the faces of people protecting themselves from COVID-19 and the flu. Extension is in our communities, thanks to the Maine Extension Homemakers.

Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) Supports Diverse Farmers

Relevance — Mental health is an often-overlooked challenge farmers face nationwide, and an area that has not been comprehensively addressed in Maine. Farmland loss and land access issues, rising production costs, plummeting farm incomes, climate change, and, most recently, the pandemic are contributing to a mental health crisis within the farming community. Many agricultural service providers lack knowledge and understanding of how to address mental health and wellness for the farm community, how to support those in the food system who are in crisis, and how to practice self-care as they do so.

Response — In the 2018 Farm Bill, the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) was established to support farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers with stress management. FRSAN offers a pathway for improving mental health awareness and access for farmers and their families. In 2021 Extension led a collaboration that received a \$500,000 grant that is being used to serve farmers. We established and manage the Maine FRSAN to support farmers, farmworkers, and agricultural service providers—of land, forest, and sea—with efforts to cultivate wellness and build resilience. New partnerships were formed with organizations, and the work plan was developed by the service providers who were the project participants through small group committees for wellness funds, small grants, mental health, and training. There are more than 250 members in the network.

Results — To date the project has regranted \$182,000 to nine organizations working to represent and support various agricultural producers. Some of the program grants helped pay for infrastructure to increase farm efficiency and reduce farmer stress for Somali Bantu and refugee farmers at the Somali Bantu Community Association and New American farmers at Cultivating Community. The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association received funding to continue to support a monthly cross-organizational equity space for agricultural service providers. Programs such as Maine Farmland Trust helped to address financial stress within farm business planning via assistantship and grants, while the UMaine Farm Coaching team continues to provide growth and development for farmers. Maine Farm to Institution used their funding to bolster existing farmer program workshops with training and materials focused on farmers accessing institutional markets.

More than \$100,000 was regrant to organizations directly serving farmers of color or indigenous land stewards. Forty farmers directly benefited through \$500 stipends for mental health and wellness activities. Educational outreach was provided in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. Mental health counseling was provided for farmers, and functional training assessments were provided to prevent injury, subsequent productivity loss, or long-term disability. Ten thousand dollars was allocated for the emergent need presented by possible PFAS contamination in soil and water on farms, and these funds were used to support testing.

This project is making a large impact on the conversation around mental health in agriculture. Partners from local organizations are counseling farmers who are stressed, providing infrastructure that increases the ability of farmers to reach their customers, and providing tools for land tenders to serve and honor traditional ways of growing in their communities. By strengthening the capacity of organizations, and building relationships and a service provider network focusing on farmer resilience and stress reduction, we are supporting a cultural shift to assist and meet the unique mental health needs of those who work in Maine agriculture.

Micro-credentialing through UMaine System Builds Workforce Competence and Confidence

Relevance — Extension provides valuable skills to both youth and adult learners. There is a need to provide employer-recognized evidence of trainings and skills for agricultural and other workers.

Response — In 2020 we began developing and issuing micro-credentials through the UMaine System. In 2022, these included micro-credentials and badges in Meat Cutting, Horticulture Apprenticeship, Seafood HACCP (hazard analysis and critical control points), Meat and Poultry HACCP, Food Processing Sanitation, Food Safety Systems, and Facilitation.

Youth in the 4-H Communication Science program are now eligible to receive the nationally normed and recognized "Oral Communication" badge from the Education Design Lab.

There is interest from additional Extension faculty, staff, and partners, and future possible Extension micro-credentials include those in farming and agricultural skills, volunteer management, and the Master Gardener program. A full youth-to-adult pathway in aquaculture is under development and should be completed in early 2023.

Results — Earners ranged from current UMaine System students to adults in the general public. These credentials can be used to showcase skills earned through the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and are verified by the University of Maine System. Micro-credentials help earners make competencies visible, beyond what is seen on a transcript or resume; demonstrate skills in real-world settings; gain work experience and receive valuable performance feedback; stand out to employers; better articulate the skills developed to potential employers; enhance digital identity; share badges; and be recognized. All micro-credentials/badges can be shared on social media and professional sites, such as LinkedIn and the holder's personal website, e-portfolio, or resume.

Diagnostic and Research Laboratories Apply New Technologies and Cross-Disciplinary

Relevance — The COVID-19 pandemic provided a stunning demonstration of the degree to which so many aspects of our lives are now intertwined. Wildlife health affects farm animal health affects human health. Every part of our economy was affected by the pandemic, vividly illustrating the importance of growing our understanding of today's many agricultural threats and how to control them.

Response — The University of Maine Cooperative Extension Diagnostic and Research Laboratory occupies a 28,000-square-foot commercial laboratory building located a few miles from campus. It houses our Veterinary Diagnostic Lab, Aquatic Animal Health Lab, Arthropod Lab, and Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratory. This facility is the most bio-secure location within the University of Maine System. Opened in 2018, the lab brings together scientists researching animals, agriculture, insects, and plants under one roof. The unique combination of researchers provides many teaching opportunities for students, as well as premier research and outreach facilities.

Results — By allowing for research contributions to agriculture, public health, communities, and wildlife, the lab benefits Maine in a variety of ways, including protecting the natural resource- and food-based economies, adding to food safety and human health, and providing unique diagnostic and testing services to farmers, homeowners, and the public.

Maine Food and Agriculture Center Is Helping to Grow the State's Economy

Relevance — With \$5 billion in overall annual economic impact, agriculture, commercial fishing, and food processing are some of Maine's largest, fastest growing, and most promising industries. UMaine Extension's research and outreach programs seek to move these industries forward through cross-disciplinary collaboration that identifies lasting solutions to issues that inhibit them.

Response — The Maine Food and Agriculture Center (MFAC) is a partnership of Extension and the Maine Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station. The center uses the 16-county reach of Extension, and many of Extension's recommendations to the state's agricultural community come directly from research conducted at Experiment Station farms. This research-extension partnership has been working for more than 100 years and is as vital today as it was early in the twentieth century.

Results — MFAC is growing to encompass all sectors of the burgeoning food economy, establish first-contact access to the programs and expertise available at all seven of Maine's public universities, and create opportunities for cross-campus and cross-discipline coordination and program development based on emerging needs in Maine's food economy.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

University of Maine Cooperative Extension Support for Oxford County

Oxford County	2022
Local Salaries and Benefits	\$142,791
Prorated Support from UMaine*	\$577,300
Computer Equipment and Networking	\$4,425
Statewide Animal Diagnostic Lab	\$18,929
Marketing, Publications, Video	\$769
Local Programming Supplies & Expenses	\$10,794
Postage	\$1,443
Telephone	\$6,665
Travel	\$5,943
TOTAL	\$769,060
* Prorated support from UMaine reflects travel, postage, telephone, computer equipment & networking, salaries & benefits for administrative and state-wide staff.	

Without statewide support, UMaine Extension would not be present in your county. Funds for projects are provided through the University of Maine, Federal Formula Funds, grants, contracts, and fees. Dollars from other sources support salaries and benefits for Extension specialists, county educators, Extension administration, computer equipment and networking, publications, postage, telephone, and travel.

Statewide Extension Funding

As a unique partnership among federal, state and county governments, UMaine Extension uses funding from Maine counties and the University to match and leverage support from the United States Department of Agriculture, other federal grantors, state agencies and private foundations. Each county UMaine Extension office is also part of a statewide organization and the national Extension system.

This pie graph illustrates the financial resources for programs offered, supported and managed out of the Oxford county office. Each year, Oxford county tax dollars support the UMaine extension with physical office space, support staff salaries, office supplies, equipment and some programming expenses.

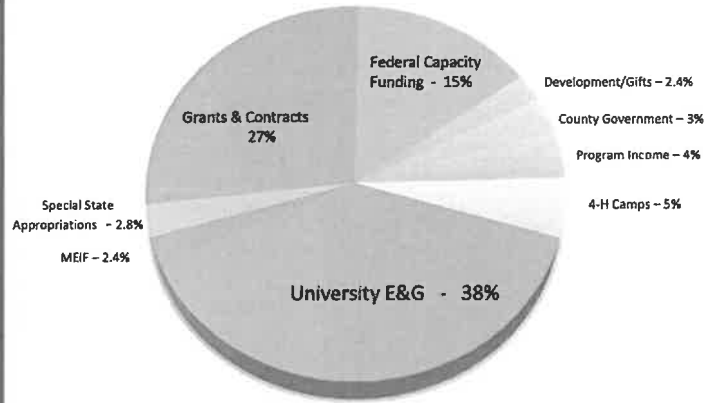
Statewide Funding Levels by Source - 2022



Cooperative Extension

Sources of Funding

Fiscal Year 2022:
\$21,139,165



The County Extension Act

The County Extension Act explains the role of county government in funding local Extension offices.

Cooperative Extension work shall consist of the giving of practical demonstrations in agriculture and natural resources, youth development, and home economics and community life and imparting information on those subjects through field demonstrations, publications and otherwise. For the purpose of carrying out this chapter, there may be created in each county or combination of two counties within the State an organization known as a "county extension association," and its services available to all residents of a county. The county extension is viewed as a unique and important educational program of county government. The executive committee of each county extension association shall prepare an annual budget as requested, showing in detail its estimate of the amount of money to be expended under this chapter within the county or counties for the fiscal year. The executive committee shall submit to the board of county commissioners on a date requested by the county commissioners, and the county commissioners may, if they deem it justifiable, adopt an appropriate budget for the county extension program and levy a tax therefore. The amount thus raised by direct taxation within any county or combination of counties for the purposes of this chapter shall be used for the salaries of clerks, provision of office space, supplies, equipment, postage, telephone, a contribution toward the salaries of county educators and such other expenses as necessary to maintain an effective county extension program.¹

¹Excerpted from Title 7, Chapter 7 of the Maine Revised Statutes, §191–§195.

For more information contact:

University of Maine Cooperative Extension Oxford County
9 Olson Road
South Paris, ME 04270

Phone: 207.743.6329 or 800.287.1482 (in Maine)
Email: extension.oxford@maine.edu



extension.umaine.edu

Oxford County Soil & Water

Requesting: \$32,200



Oxford County Soil and Water Conservation District

17 Olson Rd. Suite 3

South Paris, Maine 04281

Phone: (207) 744-3111

Email: oxfordcountyswcd@outlook.com

September 14, 2023

Oxford County Commissioners
26 Western Ave.
South Paris, ME 04281

Dear County Commissioners & Budget Committee,

In putting forward our FY2024 budget request, the Oxford County Soil & Water Conservation District would first like to thank you for all your continuing support going back over 40 years. Your continued support allows us to provide valuable technical assistance and education programs to people of Oxford County and we are grateful for your generous support.

The past year has been very busy and productive for the District and we wanted to share our most recent project successes and achievements with you to give you an idea of how your investment in us has benefited Oxford County. Attached is a list of the highlights of the past year to present. They include the most recent news about our "Agroforestry and Climate Resiliency Demonstration Project" at Tenmile River Demonstration Forest, EPA funded Watershed Protection Projects, DEP-level Site Plan Reviews, and our ever-growing Education and Outreach programs.

In addition to the highlighted projects and programs, the District continues to provide the following Engineering and Technical Assistance services to Oxford County towns, private land owners, developers and lake associations, by request:

- Best Management Practice (BMP) Evaluations
- 3rd Party Compliance Inspections for Towns
- Site Plan and Subdivision Peer Reviews
- Erosion Control Plans
- Gravel Road Evaluations and Maintenance Plans
- GIS Mapping Services
- Permit by Rule Guidance and Preparation.
- LakeSmart Evaluations
- Stormwater Management Plans
- Shoreline Buffer Designs and Planning Assistance

Oxford County SWCD also owns and manages several properties which it maintains out of operating funds:

- The Tenmile River Demonstration Forest: 535 acres of woodland property in Brownfield and Hiram, developed, and recently expanded, to demonstrate Sustainable Forestry principals. It is also open to the public for hiking, snowshoeing, geocaching, and nature appreciation.



Oxford County Soil and Water Conservation District

17 Olson Rd. Suite 3

South Paris, Maine 04281

Phone: (207) 744-3111

Email: oxfordcountyswcd@outlook.com

- Cooper Spring: a public roadside spring in South Paris which is tested monthly to keep in compliance with Public Drinking Water standards.
- McDonough Brook and Colton Brook Dams: 2 large, earthen, flood control dams located in Stow that require annual clearing of debris, mowing, and Emergency Action Plan updates biannually.

We are happy to be able to serve Oxford County and deeply appreciate your annual contribution to support our efforts. Last year you granted us a much-needed increase in funding and this year the Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry also provided an increase in annual funding. As a result, we find our Conservation District, for the first time in many years, in a more secure and sustainable financial position. We request that Oxford County's Contribution to the Oxford County Soil & Water Conservation District remain the same as last year at \$32,200. Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Merle Ring

Merle Ring, Chairman
Oxford SWCD Board of Supervisors

Attachments:

FY 2024 Proposed Operating Budget
Highlights

CONSERVATION - TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE – EDUCATION

All programs and activities of the Oxford County Soil & Water Conservation District are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, ethnicity, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, marital or family status, political belief, citizenship status, veteran's status or disability.

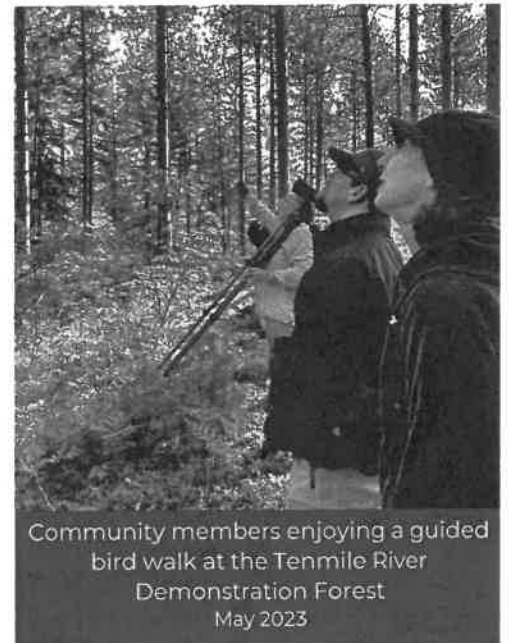
OXFORD COUNTY SWCD PROJECT & PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS 2022-23

Oxford County SWCD provides valuable natural resource conservation technical assistance and educational programs throughout Oxford County to help address a great variety of conservation topics and issues. Providing these services and education programs helps protect our beautiful lakes, streams, farms, and forestland, of which we are all proud.

Here are some of the highlights of the past year:

Tenmile River Demonstration Forest

Tenmile River Demonstration Forest in Hiram and Brownfield, is now the largest Demonstration Forest in the State of Maine, with 535 acres of woodland. The Demo Forest is a place where we can show conservation and forest management in action with visible examples of conservation practices and education programs that increase understanding of how our forests contribute to ecological stability and help fight climate change. This year we successfully submitted 4 grant requests: one to Project Canopy to update our Forest Management Plan reflect the management objectives of the newly acquired parcels added in 2021 and 2022, and 3 grants, totaling \$20,200, to support the implementation of the “Agroforestry and Climate Resiliency Demonstration Project”. This project will highlight alternative forest products, timber stand improvement, and soil health.



Community members enjoying a guided bird walk at the Tenmile River Demonstration Forest
May 2023



Armored ditch to prevent soil erosion and road damage

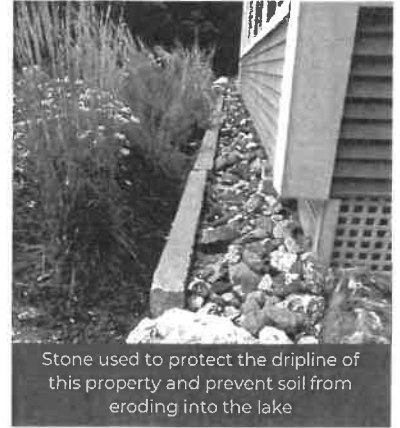
319 Watershed Protection Projects

In 2022 and early 2023 we completed the Lake Penneesseewassee and lake Anasagunticook Water Protection Projects. Now, two additional projects are being carried out in the Lake Penneesseewassee (Phase II) and Hogan and Whitney Ponds Watersheds (Phase II), in Norway and Oxford. The new projects are putting over \$172,000 in Federal EPA Funds and \$123,000 in local match to work addressing Non-point Source Pollution. These projects not only protect water quality and property values, but also provide cost-share to help the towns of Norway and Oxford install vital stormwater management infrastructure.



Stormwater Management Plans & Erosion and Sediment Control Site Law Reviews

Stormwater Management Plans and Erosion and Sediment Control Site Law Reviews, done by our contracted engineer, are DEP-level reviews that assure that Oxford County development projects are utilizing the Best Management Practices that help protect our land and water natural resources from degradation. Eight have been requested and completed in the past year.



Stone used to protect the dripline of this property and prevent soil from eroding into the lake



Natural Resource Education & Outreach

Our programs have expanded and are now reaching new audiences. We continue to conduct the Southwestern Maine Envirothon, Agriculture and Conservation Education Days at the Waterford and Oxford Fairs and vital outreach on social media to inform people about Invasive Forest Pests to prevent their spread. Our workshop and class topics have included Soil Health, Farm Tours, Native Pollinator Habitat Enhancement, Bat Conservation, Gravel Road Maintenance, Farm Pond Construction, Bird Walks, Mushroom Foraging, and the list keeps growing.

Without the generous support of Oxford County, we would not be able to provide these technical assistance and educational opportunities to the people of Oxford County.

We are grateful for your ongoing support.



Oxford County Soil & Water Conservation District
Proposed Operating Budget
FY 2024

Income		
	Funding-State	37500
	Funding-County	32200
	District Property Income	4500
	Grant Income (net)	13620
	Fee-For-Service/Contracted Serv	15000
	Interest Income	102
	Dividend Income	68
	Fundraising/District Sales (net)	3500
	Outreach & PR	875
	Educational Program Income	<u>1750</u>
Total Income		109115
Expenses		
	Professional Fees	10000
	Payroll	83750
	Administrative Costs	4902
	Office Lease	3828
	District Property Maintenance	2200
	Educational Program Costs	500
	Dues & Subscriptions	3345
	Licenses & Permits	90
	District Outreach/ PR Costs	<u>500</u>
Total Expenses		109115
Net Profit/Loss		0

Western Maine Transportation

Requesting: \$14,000



Michael Burke, Chairperson

Sandra Buchanan, Executive Director

August 22, 2023

Oxford County Commissioners and Budget Committee
C/O Donald Durrah, County Administrator
26 Western Avenue
South Paris ME 04281

Commissioners and Budget Committee members:

Thank you for funding Western Maine transportation Services' (WMTS) in Oxford County. This covers some of the operating costs and qualifies as local match to draw down federal funding at approximately 40% local to 60% federal.

For this budget cycle, we are requesting \$14,000 based on significant cost increases in maintaining and acquiring buses, fuel price volatility, wage increases, and, we're pleased to report, an 11% increase in ridership from 8/1/2021-7/31/2022 to 8/1/2022-7/31/2023. We truly appreciate whatever Oxford County is able to provide to fund public transportation.

Riders use WMTS to access employment, higher education and trades training, grocery, retail, recreational and leisure destinations, government offices, personal and professional services, and healthcare appointments of all types. Many riders are 65 and older, and many have disabilities, but there is now more age diversity in our ridership. Regardless of age, most WMTS riders do not have viable alternatives to taking public transit.

WMTS currently provides:

- Demand-response bus services in Norway/South Paris/Oxford with additional limited services provided to West Paris and Hebron, limited service in Rumford/Mexico/Dixfield, and special requested service to other towns.
- Monday-Friday GreenLine Connection bus service from Rumford/Mexico/Dixfield, through Peru and Canton, to Livermore connecting to the "GreenLine" commuter bus which travels between Farmington and Lewiston~Auburn.
- Seasonal Mountain Express commuter bus service between Dixfield/Mexico/Rumford and Sunday River
 - Sunday River, provides most, of the funding for the Mountain Express service, and it may not operate this season due to Sunday River's workforce transportation grant. We will know more in a few weeks.
- Please note that the Mountain Explorer is separately funded by Bethel, Newry, Sunday River and area businesses.
- WMTS has been approached to provide additional services in the River Valley area, if resources allow.

Buses expected to arrive between December 2023 and March 2024, are now likely delayed until June of 2024. We have also learned buses will now cost between 75% and 100% more than pre-pandemic.

The supply chain for parts is improving, but maintenance costs have not decreased. With older buses requiring more maintenance, and no additional buses, WMTS is currently limited in services it can provide. Driver recruitment is improving and WMTS is now providing training in-house. To remain competitive, however, salaries remain higher.

WMTS is completing its maintenance facility expansion, including an additional two-bus work bay to improve maintenance efficiency, and a bus wash to reduce corrosion and make the buses more attractive to riders. We invite you to visit.

If you become aware of transportation needs your communities, or if you have questions about our services, or this request, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Craig Zurhorst
Community Relations Manager
czurhorst@westernmainetrans.org
207-330-3315



Western Foothills Land Trust

Requesting: \$3,000



Western Foothills Land Trust is dedicated to the conservation and protection of native ecosystems, farm and forestlands, watersheds, and scenic landscapes for the benefit of wild and human communities in western Maine.

September 12, 2023

Oxford County Commissioners
26 Western Ave
South Paris, ME 04281

Dear Oxford County Commissioners,

The Western Foothills Land Trust turned 36 this year. We protect approximately 7000 acres by fee or conservation easement in the greater Oxford Hills and manage seven preserves with 34 miles of recreational trails. For the health and benefit of our whole community, and our visitors, we offer events and programs year-round, free to the public. The Trust is requesting consideration for \$3000 to support overall trail restoration.

2023 has been a year of record rainfalls, frequent storms, resulting in unprecedented impact to roads, trails and lakes and ponds. Recreational trails managed by the Trust at Noyes Mountain, Roberts Farm, Shepard's Farm and Hawk Mountain were particularly impacted. Our volunteer crews were out with chain saws and shovels opening up trail corridors after heavy snowfall followed by 2" of rain and then sudden freezing temperatures around the new year. Again in the spring and several times this summer volunteers were out repairing damage. We have patched and filled, redirected runoff, and made plans to reset popped culverts. Working with the NRCS we will enlarge some culverts, and replace others with bridges as funding allows.

We are requesting \$3000 to support trail restoration projects across the seven preserves. The funds will be used to supply volunteer crews with the materials they need to tackle issues. Requested funds will be used to purchase fill, mulch, bridge decking, wood for box culverts, and fuel for volunteered tractors and mini-excavators. The Oxford County Commissioners will be recognized on our website and at trailheads.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Lee Dassler

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee Dassler", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Development Director



Damage to Half Witt board walk, Norway, Dec 2022



Massive numbers of trees down across the Witt-End trail that were cleared post-storm